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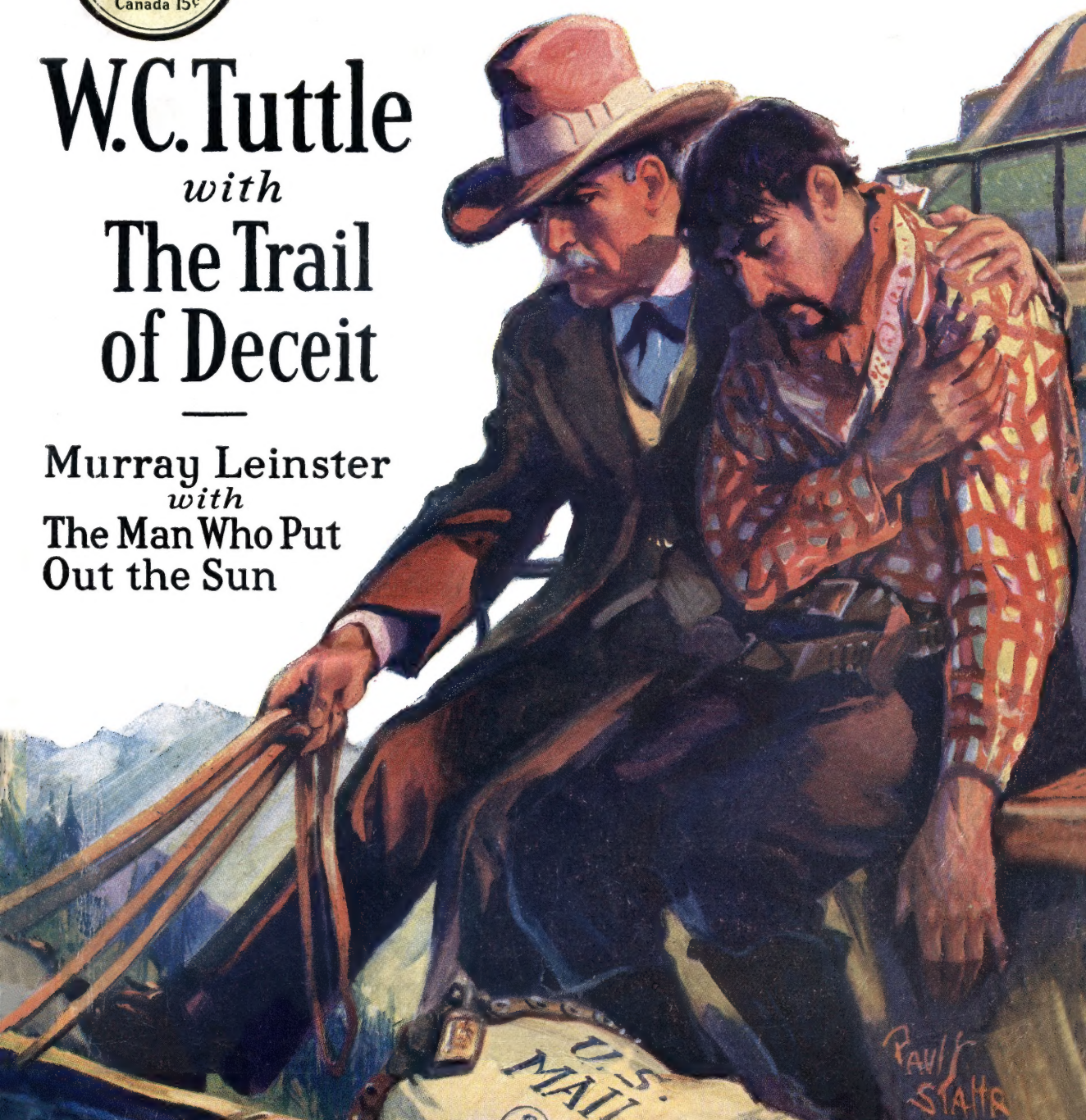

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VOLUME 213 | CONTENTS FOR JUNE 14, 1930 | NUMBER 1

SERIALS

The Trail of Deceit (Six Parts. Part I) . . . . . W. C. Tuttle 4
A tangled mystery of the modern cow country

The Radio Menace (Six Parts. Part II) . . . . Ralph Milne Farley 5
Robot super-scientists invade America

Strong Man (Four Parts. Part III) . . . . . Anthony M. Rud 9
A curious mission in Alabama's "piney woods"

Voodoo'd (Six Parts. Part VI) . . . . . Kenneth Perkins 12
Mystery in Creole New Orleans

COMPLETE STORIES

The Man Who Put Out the Sun (Novelette) . . . Murray Leinster 2
Science threatens to wreck the world

The Jungle Arena (Short Story) . . . . . Lieut. John Hopper 8
A championship fight without title or purse

Epicures (Short Story) . . . . . John H. Thompson 11
Bill and Jim are accessories to a bombing

Ol' Missoura (Short Story) . . . . . Joseph Knox Stone 13
An ammunition carrier in the front line

OTHER FEATURES

COVER DESIGN . . . . . Paul Stahr
The American Pyramid . . . . . H. R. Pace 5
Primitive Boats . . . . . Minna Irving 9
Watchdog of the Treasury . . . . . Randolph S. Hancock 11
The Men Who Make The Argosy—W. C. TUTTLE 14
Argonotes 14
Looking Ahead ! 14

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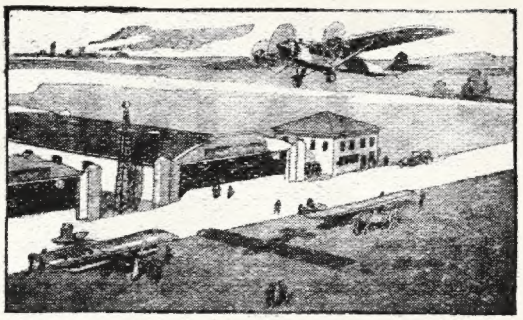

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VOLUME 213 | SATURDAY, JUNE 14, 1930 | NUMBER 1

They sprang up from the card table at the sound of shots

The Trail of Deceit

The cowmen of the Keno range were working strangely at cross-purposes and few knew where they stood, when Goober Glendon and Johnny Wells came riding into the mix-up

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Bluffer's Luck," "Me and Peewee Ltd.," etc.

CHAPTER I.

SHOOTING SCRAPE.

"THE West," said "Goober" Glendon, speaking authoritatively, "ain't nothin' like what she was. Now, I can remember the time, when—"

"How do yuh feel toward that pot?" interrupted a cowboy, fingering his cards nervously.

"Oh, yeah," said Goober softly. He moistened the tips of his fingers on his lips and proceeded to peek at the pips of his cards. "She's been raised twice, eh? Costs me fifteen *pesos* to see what

you've got. Le's make her twenty to see mine."

"I ain't held a hand since the Jamestown flood," sighed his young partner, Johnny Wells, tossing his five cards among the discards. "If I ever drawed one to a pair, I'd frame 'em."

Two men called Goober's bet.

"Three typewriters and a couple Johns," said Goober, spreading out three queens and two jacks.

"Yo're pretty lucky," observed Cal Sands, foreman of the Star A outfit. "You dealt that mess, didn't yuh?"

Goober looked keenly at Sands. "Yeah, I dealt it; why?"

"Nothin'; I just wanted to know whose deal it was next."

Johnny Wells glanced quickly at Goober, who was calmly stacking up his chips. They were partners, these two—Johnny and Goober—partners in a strange town. They had ridden into Silver Bar late that afternoon, and decided to stay all night. Their destination was the Keno range, twenty miles northwest. They did not know any of the men at the table.

Goober Glendon was past fifty, partly bald, of medium height, but very thin. His features were sharp, deeply lined, his nose slightly hooked; thin-lipped mouth topped a square chin, which jutted a trifle. His eyes were a faded blue, almost hidden beneath bushy gray eyebrows.

Johnny Wells was twenty-five, range born and raised. He was of medium height, with the physique of a middleweight fighter. His hair was inclined to auburn, wide blue eyes, nose slightly upturned above a laughing mouth. Johnny was good-looking. Both men wore battered Stetsons, faded shirts, and overalls. Goober wore the shotgun type of chaps, while Johnny affected the flaring batwing variety.

Their belts and holsters were identical, because of the fact that Goober had made them by hand. Goober carried an old, black-handled Colt, while his young companion wore a Colt with carved bone handles.

The game progressed slowly, with Goober steadily piling up chips, while Johnny was hardly able to keep even. Cal Sands drank liquor and swore at his luck. Sands was tall and dark, with snapping black eyes. His hat was black, shirt black, and he wore black trousers. There was not a touch of color about the man. Sands was possibly thirty years of age, and had been foreman of the Star A outfit for three years.

"DID I hear you say somethin' about goin' over to Keno?" asked Sands, speaking to Goober.

Goober nodded slowly, studying his cards. "Yea-a-ah, we're ridin' thataway to-morrow . . . Check the bet."

"Know anybody over there?"

"No-o-o-o, I don't reckon we do. Me and Johnny jist driftin' in for a look around. You acquainted over there?"

"I'm from that part of the country."

"Thasso? You know Frank C. Austin?"

"Sure."

"So do I. Me and Frank was bunkies long time ago. We're goin' over and hit Frank for a job."

Sands laughed shortly. "Do yuh think Austin is out there runnin' a ranch?"

"Ain't he?"

"With all the money and interests he owns?"

Goober's faded eyes studied the face of Sands for several moments.

"I didn't know," he said mildly. "The last time I see Frank Austin, I reckon him and me would assay about the same amount."

"Must have been a long time ago."

"Somethin' like twenty-two, twenty-three year ago."

"Austin is one of the big financiers of the Pacific Coast now."

"I'll be damned! Where did he hit it rich like that?"

"Smart investments and all that."

"Yuh got to have money to make investments."

"Austin married money."

"Oh," thoughtfully. "Then he got married agin, eh?"

"Again? I didn't know he ever was married more than once."

Goober picked up his five cards and studied them closely The pot was played out and a new deal started, when Sands said:

"What about Austin bein' married before?"

"My mistake," said Goober softly. "I was thinkin' of another man."

"I've got enough," sighed Johnny, passing the bet. He leaned back in his chair and began rolling a cigarette.

"I'm goin' to hit the hay pretty quick," said Goober. "I'm so sleepy, I can't hardly see my cards."

"I'd hate to play yuh, when yo're asleep," growled Sands. He started to shove in a stack of red chips, when from out in the street came the report of two shots, spaced about two seconds apart.

"What the devil's goin' on out there?" snorted Sands, kicking back his chair. The men were all up from the table, crowding to the doorway.

There seemed to be a little commotion up the street a short distance, and two men were coming down the rickety sidewalk. They reached the doorway, a big, burly man, shoving a drunken young man ahead of him. The younger man was almost too drunk to walk, too drunk to argue intelligently. The big man wore a sheriff's shield on the lapel of his old vest. He had a gun in his left hand and one in his holster, as he shoved the reeling young man into the saloon. He dropped the gun on the card table and turned to Sands.

"Git this damn fool out of here, Sands; he just shot Jigger Slade."

"Killed him, Nolan?"

"I think so. Self-defense. Him and Jigger been quarrelin' all evenin.' Yuh know, they rode in together this afternoon."

Sands grasped the drunk by the shoulders and shook him roughly.

"Hal," he gritted. "Why didja shoot Slade?"

But the young man merely looked more dazed and slumped back against the bar.

"Hell of a note!" snorted Sands. "And his father due in on that midnight train."

"Frank Austin comin' in to-night?" asked Sheriff Nolan.

"Yeah—mebbe the rest of the family. Wilson," he turned quickly to the other cowboy, who had been in the game, "will you take this fool kid back to Keno? Git a livery rig, if he ain't able to ride. I'll make it all right with yuh."

"Sure, I'll take him for yuh, Cal."

"Good. C'mon, Hal, you poor fool."

Nolan, the sheriff, went with them. It broke up the game.

GOOBER and Johnny went up the street to the saloon in front of which the shooting had taken place. They had laid the body out on top of an old pool table, and a doctor was making an examination. No one

seemed to know much about it, except that it was self-defense; and no one seemed greatly concerned. It seemed that Jigger Slade was a cowboy from Austin's Star A ranch near Keno City.

They wandered back to the other saloon and found Sands and the sheriff back from the livery stable. Sands spoke confidentially to Goober.

"Yo're an old friend of Frank Austin, yuh say?"

"Yeah."

"Then don't mention this to him, if yuh see him. That's his kid. No doubt of its bein' in self-defense. The sheriff will fix it up here; so there won't be anythin' said. It might make Austin feel awful bad."

"I know," nodded Goober.

"The kid is awful wild," sighed Sands. "We've had plenty trouble with him."

"Didja git him started out all right?"

"Oh, sure; he's safe for the present."

"What became of that six-gun?" asked Nolan, looking around. "I put it on that card table, didn't I?"

"I saw yuh put it there," said Johnny.

"Mebbe Wilson took it," offered Sands. "He was there by the table. He knew it was Hal's gun."

"Well, the damn fool!" snorted the sheriff angrily. "What right would he have to take that gun?"

"Bein' as it was self-defense—" said Goober mildly.

"You don't need it for evidence," said the bartender quickly.

The sheriff growled something and walked out.

"We might as well go to bed, Johnny," yawned Goober. "I shore need a lot of shut-eye to-night."

"Same here."

They went across the street and into the dingy little hotel, where they had rented a room. Johnny lighted the lamp and drew down the one curtain, while Goober sat down on the creaking bed and drew the missing gun from inside his shirt. It was a forty-five Colt, double action. Goober swung out the cylinder, exposing two empty cartridges. Then he took an old envelope from his pocket, tore off a corner and placed it to reflect the light, when he squinted through the barrel of the gun. He snorted softly and handed the gun to Johnny, who also peered down the barrel.

"Shines like a new dollar!" grunted Johnny. "This gun ain't been shot to-night, Goober."

"That's what I reckoned when I saw young Austin. He was too drunk to even pull a gun. Somebody shifted them empty shells damn quick."

Johnny laughed softly. "No wonder the sheriff wanted that gun."

Goober nodded slowly as he drew off his boots.

"This kid's dad and me was bunkies once, Johnny. Frank was a hell-winder in them days, and he was shore strong for backin' up a friend. That's why I stole that gun. I'd do a lot for Frank. They'll scare the tripe out of that kid. He won't know whether he fired a shot or not, because he was too drunk to realize anythin'."

"How about us goin' over to Keno City?" asked Johnny.

"Shore, we'll go. Even if Frank Austin ain't there, we'll take a look at the country. But I'd like to see Frank. Married money and becomes one of the big men, eh? That's what you ort to do, Johnny. Git yourself a rich wife."

"Yeah, I'll do that," seriously.

"And a orphing."

"A what?"

"Orphing. Damn, you know what a orphing is, don'tcha, Johnny? A kid what never had a father or a mother."

"Incubator baby," nodded Johnny. "I was reading about one in a paper."

"Yeah, that's the kind. Pick a rich one."

"Why an orphan?" queried Johnny.

"Saves yuh the trouble of killin' relatives. You better undress and git in bed. Sa-a-a-ay! Ain'tcha goin' to say yore prayers?"

"Who would I pray for?" demanded Johnny, half under the covers.

"Well," thoughtfully, "yuh might say a few for the jasper that killed Slade."

IT was midnight when the train pulled in at Silver Bar, and the Austin family climbed down from a Pullman. They could have gone on fifteen miles to Indian Wells and taken the branch line up to Keno City, which ran a mixed train on an uncertain schedule, but Austin preferred getting off at Silver Bar and taking the stage over to Keno City. In either case they would have to stay overnight, and the poor accommodations at Silver Bar were much better than those at Indian Wells.

Cal Sands met them at the little depot and escorted them over to the little hotel. It was the first time Mrs. Austin or her daughter Betty had ever been there, and the first time Sands had ever seen either of them. Frank Austin was a portly, business man type, well-groomed, gray-haired, smooth-shaved. His features were well-shaped, but he looked flabby, tired.

Mrs. Austin was a stately woman of more than medium height. Despite her platinum-gray hair she looked much younger than her fifty years.

Betty was like her mother in build, but a decided blonde, blue-eyed. Betty Austin was handsome—but not pretty. She shook hands with Cal Sands in the dim light of the depot lantern, and he thrilled at the firm grip of her small gloved hand.

"Yore first trip to the cow country?" he inquired.

"Yes—the first," as her eyes traveled over his tall figure, clad in severe black.

Sands had reserved the rooms for them at the hotel. They seemed very poor to the women, but Austin hastened to assure them that they were the best to be had. When Betty had settled in her room, Austin closed the door and motioned Sands to a chair.

"What's new, Cal?" he asked.

"Not much, since I wrote you, Austin. There was a shooting scrape here to-night, and Jigger Slade was killed."

"Slade? The name is familiar."

"One of my men."

"Is that so? Who shot him?"

"Jigger was drinkin' pretty heavy, and he got into a quarrel with a cowboy from over in the Flask River country. Jim Nolan, the sheriff, saw it. The Flask River cowboy shot to save himself; so there wasn't any arrest."

"My heavens, what a place!" exclaimed Mrs. Austin. "Does this happen often?"

"No," smiled Sands. "No, ma'am; it's kinda rare."

"I should hope so."

"What about Hal?" asked Austin anxiously. "Ever since your letter—well, that's why we came down here, Sands."

"I know," nodded the foreman. "Well, there's not much more to tell. Hal's all right. I'm not tryin' to worry yuh about him, but I thought yuh ought to know. He won't stay at the ranch, because I said he ought to keep away from that Diaz place. I had a

long talk with him about it, and we almost had a fight. Hal's hot-headed, and he won't listen to reason. I told him I was goin' to write you all about it."

"What did he say to that?"

"Well, I'd hate to repeat it here. Anyway, he told me a few things. Yeah, he went a long ways back in my ancestry and dug up things I didn't know about myself. Then he took his things and moved to town."

"He needs discipline," said Mrs. Austin severely.

"He needs something," growled Austin. "What about that Mexican girl?"

"In what way?"

"Is she chasing after Hal?"

Sands laughed softly. "You've got her all wrong, Austin. Juana Diaz never chased after any man—they come to her."

"Good-looking?"

"You answer that after you see her."

"She must be a low creature," said Mrs. Austin.

"To give the devil his due—she's not," said Sands. "Juana Diaz is as straight as a string, partly educated and as proud as a queen."

"ARE you backing Hal in this?" asked Austin quickly.

"I am not."

"Well, we'll take this up later," said Austin wearily. "I suppose Hal is in Keno City now, isn't he?"

"Should be."

"I'll see him to-morrow. Now, what about the rustlers, Cal?"

Sands shrugged his shoulders. "Still goin' strong. Those seven polo mares and the black stallion—"

"You don't mean to say they've been stolen?"

"They're gone."

"The devil they are! Well—why—uh—" Austin spluttered. "What's the matter with La Plante?"

"He's done about all any sheriff could do. Thinks they were taken over the border, where they can disfigure the brands enough to make 'em look like not much of anythin', and pass 'em back as Mexican raised. You know, them Mexicans and Injuns have the queerest-lookin' brands on earth. Not even registered."

"That's true. But damn it, Cal, I can't stand for things like that. This continual drain will soon ruin the Star A. Your report was enough to knock me off my chair."

"Yeah, it shore would."

"Well, you go on and get some sleep. We can stay a week or so at the ranch, and perhaps we can straighten things out."

"I hope yuh can, Austin—it shore needs it. Well, good night, folks. I'll hit the hay."

Sands closed the door and went down the uncarpeted hall, his spurs rasping. From the other side of the partition, Goober Glendon took his ear away from the thin wall, and padded back to bed.

"Yo're a regular old lady," grunted Johnny sleepily. "It's a wonder to me you don't git yore ears sawed off for listenin' thataway."

"Uh-huh," softly.

"Didn't yuh ever git a poke in the snoot for bein' nosey?"

"Shore, I have; but I've heard enough to pay for the poke," Goober maintained. "Jist now I heard that Jigger Slade was killed by a waddy from Flask River, and that Frank Austin is down here to keep his kid from marryin' a Mexican girl, and to stop rustlin'."

"Old Mother Hubbard she went out

and rubbered," said Johnny, and began snoring softly.

TOMMY WILSON and Hal Austin, meantime, were nearly over to Keno City, before Hal sobered sufficiently to understand what Wilson told him about the shooting.

"You say I shot Jigger?" asked Hal vacantly, as the buggy jolted along the stage road.

"You shore did."

"Why?"

"How'd I know? I didn't see it. Jim Nolan reported that you two had quarreled."

"Nolan? He's the sheriff over there, ain't he?"

"Yeah."

"I think he's a liar."

"You was too drunk to know anythin' about it. Yuh shot him twice."

"Nolan?"

"No-o-o-o! You shot Jigger Slade."

"Let's turn around and go back," snapped Austin.

"What for?"

"Well, I've lost my gun, for one thing, and I—"

"The sheriff took it."

"All right. Turn around and let's go back. I want to tell that sheriff what I think of him."

Hal had grasped the lines, but Wilson immediately jerked them away from him.

"Let them lines alone, you drunken idiot! Listen to me: Nolan says you shot in self-defense. Yo're all cleared. Let it go at that. And yore family are due in on that train at Silver Bar tonight."

"They are, eh?"

"Didn't you know it?"

"Slade said he heard they were, but I didn't believe it."

"Well, they are, and you better sleep off yore jag and sober up before they see yuh."

"Is Sands down there?"

"Shore is. He's down there to meet 'em."

"The big, black four-flusher!" snorted Hal. "He's down there to tell the Old Man a lot of lies about me, I suppose. Well, if the Old Man wants to believe Sands—all right. I'm big enough to take care of myself."

"Yeah, yo're big enough," agreed Wilson wearily.

"I sure am."

After a few minutes, Hal resumed: "Do you really believe that I shot Slade?"

"Yuh shore did."

"I liked Slade."

"Go to sleep and forget it."

"Sleep! This is sure going to put me in bad with the family. I suppose Sands will tell dad all about that shooting."

"Yore father used to be out in this country, and he'll understand."

"He might, but mother won't—not her and Betty. Are you sure Slade is dead?"

"He was dead when we left. It was lucky that the sheriff saw the shootin'."

"I wish I knew what Slade and I quarreled about. I don't remember."

"Both of yuh drunk."

"That's the funny part of it," sighed Hal.

"What's funny?"

"Slade don't drink. The last I remember he had every pocket full of cigars. And here's another thing—Slade could easily beat me to the draw with a gun, if he was sober and I was drunk."

"You better sleep it off," advised Wilson.

"All right, all right. But I'm going to find out more about this. The bar-

tender could prove that Slade wasn't drunk."

CHAPTER II.

A WARM WELCOME.

GOOBER GLENDON met Frank Austin on the street next morning, and Austin would have passed him by without a sign of recognition.

"Hyah, Frank," said Goober, his pale eyes twinkling. Austin turned quickly to look at the lean old cowboy.

"I beg your pardon?" said Austin blankly.

"Don't yuh remember Goober Glendon, Frank?"

"Goober Glendon? Why, I—yes, I believe I do. How are you?"

"Pretty goo-o-o-od," drawled Goober slowly. "You ain't tryin' to be funny, are yuh?"

"Funny? Not at all."

"You jist barely remember me, eh?"

"Yes, I remember you."

"Well, that's fine," said Goober coldly, and walked on. Goober was hurt, and justly so. He and Frank Austin had ridden the range together, fought together, slept under the same blanket on the round-up. Now Frank Austin barely remembered him.

"Money," decided Goober bitterly. "Too much money."

He passed Mrs. Austin and Betty a few minutes later, as he was going down to the livery stable, where he found Johnny Wells.

"Didja see Austin?" asked Johnny.

"Yeah, I seen him."

"Ask him about jobs on his ranch?"

Goober leaned against the stall and considered Johnny's question. Finally he sighed deeply and shook his head.

"Johnny, I've been hurt damn bad. Me and Austin used to be closer'n two fingers on the same hand—but he's shore forgot all about them days."

"Yuh mean he didn't know yuh, Goober?"

"I told him who I was, and he—he kinda remembered me. Not a hell of a lot, but the name was kinda familiar, somehow."

"That's kinda funny," said Johnny soberly.

"It ain't funny to me."

"You know what I mean, Goober. By the way, I seen the wife and daughter."

"Good-lookin' girl. Looks a lot like her brother."

"Uh-huh," Johnny said thoughtfully. "The old lady shore looks high and mighty. Betcha if she was hit hard, she'd fall full length. Walks like she didn't have a joint in her back. Well, Goober, what are we goin' to do?"

"Goin' to Keno City, f'r one thing. Might as well saddle up and hit the hills before it gits too blamed hot."

"Suits me," nodded Johnny. "You pay for the feed and I'll hook on the hulls. Didja pay the bill at the hotel?"

"Paid it last night."

The stage team was being harnessed, as the pair rode out of Silver Bar, and they saw the Austin family, with Cal Sands, in front of the stage office. None of them paid any attention to the two cowboys. Johnny looked them over, but Goober rode stiffly, looking ahead, chin tilted up a little.

In earlier days Keno City was a trading post, building up slowly as the cattle business increased. It had no name, until a gambler, noticing four cottonwoods in a row, said, "Keno."

Some one facetiously added the "City," and the place had a name. Later a branch railroad was built in

from Indian Wells, fifteen miles south, and extended to Shelby, thirty miles north. Before the advent of the railroad, Keno City's only connection with the outside world was via stage line to Silver Bar; and this stage line still existed. Silver Bar was in a different county than Keno City, which was also a county seat.

But in spite of the railroad and the county offices, Keno City never grew out of the cow-town stage. As a cowboy rhymed it:

"Keno town, Main Street, Miles' Hotel and nothin' to eat."

IT was ten miles from Indian Wells down to the Mexican border, and Indian Wells was more Mexican than English. The Star A ranch was located three miles east of Keno City.

Goober Glendon and Johnny rode into Keno City and stabled their horses. They had traveled slowly, but were glad to dismount and stretch their legs. A café sign beckoned them, and they were soon doing justice to "cowboy turkey," otherwise known as ham and eggs, country style.

"She looks like a gone-to-seed cowtown," observed Goober between mouthfuls. "Signs all faded, hitch-racks half et up. Must be a lot of horses fatted up on post oats around here."

Over against the wall, sadly contemplating the remains of his meal, was a tall, sad-eyed cowboy person. He turned his sad eyes upon Goober and nodded.

"Gone t' seed," he said slowly. "And these yere broncs around Keno City are kin to a beaver. 'F they had a little water, they'd prob'ly build dams out of them hitch-racks."

"Shy on water, eh?" asked Goober seriously.

"Huh! Yuh didn't see no clouds in the sky when yuh come in, didja?"

"Not a one, pardner."

"Uh-huh. I was jist tryin' to estimate how far it was to water. When a rain cloud comes along we're closer t' water than usual."

"Have to go deep, eh?" queried Johnny.

"Couple thousand feet below that. Strangers, ain'tcha? Yea-a-ah, yuh don't look like anybody I've seen, and I know everybody. My name's William Wallace Hill, deppity sheriff. Knowed far and wide as Smoky Hill. You stealum, we git yuh. That's our motto. Only we don't git nobody."

"Who's the sheriff over here?" asked Goober.

"Peter Quincy La Plante. Sounds fancy, don't it? But he ain't. When it comes to bein' a sheriff, Pete's jist like a pair of crutches, goin' huntin' for a cripple."

Smoky got up and stretched his six feet five to about six feet eight, settled back to his normal height and sighed deeply.

"Know a sheriff named Nolan?" asked Goober.

"Nolan? Over around Silver Bar? Shore. Good man, Nolan is."

"Didja know a feller named Jigger Slade?"

"Uh-huh. Works for the Star A out here."

"Did," corrected Goober dryly. "Got killed in Silver Bar last night."

"Killed? The hell he did! Who killed him?"

"I heard," said Goober slowly, "that it was a waddy from over on the Flask River country. Self-defense—both drunk."

"Oh, yea-a-a-ah? Imagine that! Slade, eh? Didn't hear what the waddy's name was, didja?"

"Nolan didn't say," Goober said in a non-committal tone.

"Nolan see it?"

"Yeah."

Smoky sat down with them until they finished, and they walked out together.

"C'mon down to the office and I'll make yuh used to Pete La Plante," invited Smoky. "Not that it's anythin' to write home about," he hastened to add, "but it's cool down there."

As they sauntered down to the office Cal Sands rode into town, and went to the stage office. Goober took a look at Sands's sorrel horse and decided that Sands had been riding rather fast. They met Pete La Plante at the office, and Goober introduced himself and Johnny by name.

Pete La Plante was a wiry little man, with fierce mustaches and a mild gray eye. He wore a thirteen collar and a number ten boot; he chewed tobacco violently and his shirt-front showed it.

"Glendon, eh?" g r u n t e d Pete. "Name's familiar. Texas Rangers?"

"Long time ago," grinned Goober.

"Same here," nodded Pete, and they shook hands solemnly.

As they started to sit down Cal Sands came striding in.

"Where in hell do yuh suppose that stage is?" asked Sands.

"What are yuh talkin' about?" replied the sheriff blankly.

"The stage from Silver Bar. It left thirty minutes ahead of me, and I never passed it on the road."

The sheriff glanced quickly at his watch.

"Jist about due now," he said.

"You never passed it?" queried Smoky.

Sands reddened angrily. "Of all the damn fool questions! I tell yuh, I left Silver Bar thirty minutes after the stage left there, and I came all the way on the road. I never passed it—and it ain't never arrived here."

"And Spook Allen knows the road pretty good, too," said Smoky. Spook Allen, he remarked, had been driving that stage for ten years.

"Be pretty hard for Spook to lose his way in that road," nodded the sheriff seriously.

"STILL, yuh never can tell what a feller will do," said Smoky conversationally. "I 'member one time down in Texas, when me and Barney Haverty got drunk and rode all n i g h t over a mile race track. Thought we was gittin' away from the sheriff, and come daylight we found him settin' in the judges' stand, waitin' for us."

"That's prob'ly a lie," observed the sheriff with a judicious air.

"But what about this missin' stage?" demanded Sands angrily.

"But is it missin'?" queried Smoky. "Jist because *you* never seen it—"

"Oh, all right. But, I hope we get a sheriff with brains next election."

"You won't," replied Smoky softly. "There's only one man in this county with brains enough to be sheriff, and he won't take the job."

"Who is that?"

"Me."

"You!" Sands snorted disgustedly and walked to the doorway.

"It's funny he could come past that stage and never see it," said the sheriff. "Must 'a' been goin' awful fast, cause that road is narrow."

Sands started to turn his head and reply to the sheriff's remark, but jerked back and looked down the road.

"Comin' now," he grunted. "What the devil? Frank Austin drivin'!"

Frank Austin was indeed driving the stage, and on the seat beside him was old Spook Allen, all doubled up in a painful position. Austin caught sight of the men in front of the sheriff's office, and swung the team over against the old wooden sidewalk.

Austin got down quickly, breathing heavily.

"Get a doctor for Allen," he ordered snappily, as he flung open the door for his wife and daughter.

"What happened?" asked Sands.

"Held up back there about two miles. Allen went for his gun, and they shot him through the shoulder."

Mrs. Austin was vehemently indignant.

"My heavens, they took our rings and all our money! Can you imagine that? Betty, do you feel faint? I know I do."

The slow moving sheriff was galvanized into action now. A sharp question to the injured driver, and Pete La Plante was running toward his stable, followed by Smoky Hill. Sands jumped into the seat and headed the stage toward the doctor's office.

"How much did they hit yuh for?" asked Goober.

Austin turned quickly. "Two diamond rings and about a thousand dollars in cash. Fine thing to happen! If we had efficient peace officers—"

"You'd almost think yuh was livin' in a city," drawled Goober. "Except that they didn't rob yuh first and kill yuh afterwards."

"How many men?" asked Johnny.

"Two—both masked," replied Austin. "Forced us to drive off the road down a dry wash."

"It was really thrilling," laughed Betty.

"I'd like to hang both of them," growled Austin.

"I suppose yuh can give a good description of 'em," said Johnny.

"Enough to fit any two men in this country."

"One of them spoke Spanish," offered Betty. "He called me *dulce amiga*. What does that mean?"

"Sweetheart," grinned Johnny.

"Oh!" Betty was willing to retire.

Sands came back from taking Allen to the doctor, and drew up at the stage office, where a curious crowd had gathered. The sheriff and deputy rode out of town on the Silver Bar road, knowing full well that the hold-up men had had plenty of time to put many a mile between them and any possible pursuit.

Sands secured a rig at the livery stable and took the Austin family away.

"Well, it was worth while to stick up that stage," mused Goober. "Thousand dollars and a couple diamond rings."

"Mighty nice-lookin' girl," said Johnny.

"You ort to nab her," stated Goober. "You could quit punchin' cows for good."

"I'll speak to her father about it," Johnny offered.

"Yeah! Tip it off to mamma, and she'll prob'ly give yuh her moral support."

"I'll betcha she would, Goober. She looked at me jist once, and I've got chilblains."

MRS. AUSTIN'S impression of the Star A ranch was not at all flattering. Her conception of an Arizona ranch was rather vague. Betty, to be sure, murmured something about its being rather picturesque. It was all in the point of view, of course.

The ranch house was a rambling old

one-story building, part frame, part adobe, with a wide porch around two sides. A huge oak almost shaded all the building. And there were the usual stables, bunk house, sheds, and corrals, all in need of repairs. There were no flowers, no grass, no shrubbery.

Old Omaha Adams, the cook—short, fat, with a face like a greasy full moon—welcomed them with an internal groan. He needed a shave and a haircut, and the flour sack around his expansive waist was not exactly spotless. Omaha was a man's cook, and he didn't like women; but in a case of this kind he was obliged to make certain concessions.

Austin went down to the stable with Cal Sands. He was still smarting over that hold-up and wanted to talk about his losses.

"The only way to get 'em is to catch 'em with the goods," declared Sands. "Them two fellers had their get-away all planned; so yuh might as well pocket yore loss, Austin."

"I realize that, Cal," nodded Austin disconsolately. "You know, those two diamonds were worth a lot of money. The one they took from my wife was of five carats, and Betty's was over three."

"Hadn't ought to wear 'em out here," replied Sands. "And another thing; you arranged to ship Slade's body out to San Francisco. You didn't need to do that. The county is supposed to handle a thing like that; and besides, Slade wasn't workin' here over three months, so you couldn't feel responsible for him."

Austin smiled wryly. "Perhaps if you knew what I know—"

"What was that?" asked Sands quickly.

"That Slade was a cattle detective, sent here by me."

"The hell he was!"

"Sad but true, Cal. Find the man who shot him, and you'll find one of the men who have been stealing our stock. They found out who he was."

"Find the man who shot him, eh?" muttered Sands.

"That's the idea."

"I'm sure sorry this happened," said Sands slowly. "I didn't aim to tell yuh, but I suppose I better; you'd find it out anyway."

"Find out what?" demanded Austin.

"That Hal killed Slade."

"My God! No, my son didn't do that, Cal!"

"Yeah, I'm afraid he did. Drunken quarrel. Nolan, the sheriff, saw it. We got Hal and sent him home last night before yore train came in."

Austin turned away and walked over to the corral fence, where he leaned against the poles, his shoulders slumped wearily.

"We'll have to keep his mother from findin' it out," said Sands.

Austin turned slowly, nodding painfully. "Yes, we can't let her know. She isn't the kind to understand. I—I've been through the mill; I know what it means. But it hurts like the devil, Cal. Hal's drinking quite a lot?"

"Too much. He gets in with a gang down in Indian Wells and they raise the devil. I've tried to talk to him, but it's no use."

"I've got to see him," said Austin wearily.

"He's twenty-one," reminded Sands. "At least that's his answer to me."

"Yes, I know. Twenty-one; a man. I don't know. Sometimes I wish I had let this place go to wreck. I'd be better off. I could write it all off my slate and not miss it financially. But I can't do

it. It's the one link that connects me with the old days."

"Hal took to the game," said Sands. "He's got the makings of a cowman, if he'd let liquor alone."

"And women," added Austin.

"Well, one woman, especially."

"I'll stop that. Where is Hal now?"

"We sent him back to Keno City, but he probably went on down to Indian Wells."

"Well, we may as well make the best of it. If we can only keep the women satisfied out here long enough to give me a little time."

"We'll do our best," smiled Sands.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE BORDER TOWN.

JUST off the main street of Indian Wells is an old two-story adobe, tinted by weather and long-vanished coats of whitewash. Barely decipherable are the signs painted on the front wall:

CASA DEL DIAZ

Vino—Polla Frita—Sala de Baile.

But in spite of the antiquity of the signs, there is plenty of wine, and a fried chicken; and one may dance on the hard-packed floor of the patio, where a pair of moulting parrots swear in Spanish at each other and at the three Mexican musicians, who seem forever twanging at their guitars and mandolin.

There is always an odor of fried chicken and spilled wine; and on the rafters hang festoons of huge red peppers, adding a spicy perfume of their own.

There is, too, Rosita Diaz, refuting the belief that all Mexican women become fat and waddly after twenty-five. Rosita is nearing fifty, above average height, slender, few lines of age in her face. Her hair is sleek and black, parted in the middle, caught together in the back with a huge black comb studded with rhinestones. She always wears black. Rosita is not handsome. They say she is hard, grasping, inflexible. A good reason; she has run the Casa del Diaz for years.

It was the morning following the shooting scrape in Silver Bar, when Hal Austin came into the Casa del Diaz. His clothes were untidy, eyes bloodshot, and he needed a shave. He came through the *cantina* and slumped into a chair in the patio, where he threw his sombrero aside and ran his fingers through his mop of disordered blond hair.

"*Dolor de cabeza?*" asked a soft voice behind him, and he turned quickly to see Juana Diaz, her lips parted in a flashing smile.

"Headache? Lordy, yes!" he said emphatically. "I've sure got one, Juana. Sit down."

He drew out a chair for her and resumed his place. Juana Diaz was said to be the prettiest girl in Indian Wells, if not in the entire country. Tall and slender, like her mother, olive skin and cheeks that needed no rouge. Her features were regular, her eyes large and long-lashed, arched brows. Just now she wore a dark dress, a gay-colored mantilla around her shoulders. Hal looked at her closely for several moments. Suddenly he leaned across the table and whispered:

"Juana, will you marry me? Right now—this morning?"

Juana drew back, her eyes wide.

"We'll find a priest," said Hal quickly. "I'm not a Catholic, but that's all right. Religion don't mean anything to me. Will you, Juana?"

"No wonder your head ache," she said slowly.

"I'm serious, Juana. I love you and I want you—right now."

"You got sometheeng matter weeth your head?"

"Don't, Juana. Please, I'm serious. I've loved you ever since the first day I came into this place. You know that; I've told you many times."

"*Si, si!*" Juana was serious now. "But why so sudden?"

"I'll tell you why. You have always thought my name was Hal Gordon. I'll admit I lied to you, Juana. My name is Hal Gordon, but the last name is Austin. My father is Frank Austin, of San Francisco. He is one of the big financial men of the Pacific Coast. He owns the Star A cattle outfit.

"I don't know what Cal Sands said about you, but I'm sure he lied to dad about both of us, and dad, mother, and my sister came to Silver Bar last night. They are at the ranch now, and dad is probably looking for me."

"To keep you from marrying me, eh?" Juana was on her feet instantly, eyes ablaze.

"That's their viewpoint," laughed Hal. "Sit down, Juana. Dad is a good scout. Mother is—well, blue blood means a lot to her. Don't you see, things have been exaggerated. Marry me to-day, and everything will be all right."

In his excitement Hal had raised his voice, even forgetting where he was. Now the soft voice of Rosita Diaz broke in on the conversation, and Hal turned to see her standing behind him. Hal flushed quickly. For some reason he had always feared Rosita Diaz just a little.

"Why did you say your name was Gordon?" she asked slowly.

"I don't know," confessed Hal. "It—it really doesn't matter, does it?"

Rosita ignored the question. "Your father is Frank Austin, the millionaire?"

Hal laughed shortly. "I don't suppose he's got that much."

"And he came down here to stop you from seeing Juana?" Rosita demanded.

"I'm not sure, but I think that is his reason."

"Because Juana is not good enough for you, eh?"

"Wait a minute," begged Hal. "Dad never saw Juana. Some one has lied to him."

Rosita's eyes were like black ice now and she laughed harshly. "No one has lied," she said. "Your father does not want you to marry a Mexican. Perhaps he is right. *Quién sabe?*"

"I'm sorry," said Hal wearily. "But I do want to marry Juana."

"You are only one of many. I want to see Juana happy. If she wants to marry you—very well; but your father must consent."

"I am of age, Mrs. Diaz."

"Years have nothing to do with it."

SOME one was coming through the *çantina*, and Rosita moved over toward the entrance to meet Porfiro Mendez, a huge, over-dressed Mexican, followed by Miguel and Ricardo Gonzales, cousins of Mendez. Mendez was picturesque in his gaudy attire, and no doubt a handsome man, from the Mexican point of view. His head was huge, features regular, with sweeping black mustaches. He was possibly fifty years of age.

Miguel and Ricardo were of different types, their heads barely reaching to Mendez's shoulders. No doubt their mother had been Indian, as the Indian

blood showed plainly in these two men. They were younger than Mendez, evil-looking, loose-lipped, drab of attire alongside Mendez.

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Mendez jovially. "'Ere ees my seester-in-law all ready to serve *polla frita* and *mucho vino* to 'ungry men. 'Ullo, Rosita. Shake 'ands weeth Mike and Deek."

"*Buenos dias,*" said Mike and Dick in chorus.

"Thees boys don't spik Englis' ver' good," grinned Mendez.

"Mike don' spik Englis' wort' damn," said Dick expansively.

"You go from hell," grunted Mike. "I'm spik twice times worse den you."

"You see?" said Mendez. "Pretty good, eh? Bimeby thees boys spik so good Englis' he's forget *español.* Seet down."

Rosita walked imperiously out to the kitchen to give the order, while Mendez looked expansively around. His eyes lighted at sight of Juana, but he scowled heavily at Hal.

"*Buenos dias, dulce amiga,*" he smiled at Juana.

"Hello, Uncle Porfiro," replied Juana, little interested.

"Onkle!" snorted Mike.

"*Tonto!* You fool!" exploded Mendez angrily, and Mike subsided. Not for nothing was Porfiro Mendez known as "Lobo," the Wolf, down across the border, where he owned and controlled the little town of Piñon.

Juana turned her back on Mendez and he scowled blackly, watching her and Hal from the corner of his eye. For a long time Mendez had coveted Juana, and he possibly had an understanding—with himself—that she was to marry him. He had given no thought to the vast difference in their ages.

Mendez shifted uneasily in his chair, as Hal and Juana talked softly. Finally he got up and walked into the *cantina* room, where he found Rosita unpacking some bottles of wine.

"Who is this young man with Juana?" he asked in Spanish.

Rosita stood up and brushed off a bottle with a cloth.

"Why do you ask?" she replied.

"Is this young man in love with Juana?"

"Of what interest is that to you, Porfiro?"

"Enough. I mean to marry Juana."

Rosita stared at him in amazement for several moments.

"You are going to marry Juana?"

"That is true."

She laughed in his face, as she placed the bottle on a table.

"You? Old enough to be her father. Porfiro, do not be a fool. Knowing you as I do, even were you of an age, I would never agree to a marriage. You see," Rosita leaned in closer, lowering her voice, "I have a memory—a memory of my sister—little Juanita."

Mendez shifted his eyes nervously. It was something he did not care to discuss.

"You drove her away," said Rosita softly. "You took another woman. Juanita came here to live with me—died here in my arms. No, Porfiro."

"Does Juana know all this?" he asked hoarsely.

"Why would I tell it to a child? Go back and eat—but forget Juana."

Mendez nodded slowly. "Who is the gringo?" he asked.

"His name is Austin."

"Austin? Austin of the Star A cattle company?"

"His son."

Mendez lifted his right hand and tugged at his mustaches, eyes almost closed. He glanced back at the door-

way to the patio, where a parrot was shrieking a meaningless jargon of Spanish words. His eyes came back to Rosita's face.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he snorted, and swaggered back to the patio, as Juana and Hal were coming out.

Rosita went to the kitchen with her bottles. Hal held out his hand to Juana.

"You weel come back?" she asked simply.

"And keep coming back," he smiled. "Let somebody try to stop me."

"Thees cheeken ees cook' to the taste of a quin," declared Mike.

"Quin?" queried the greasy Dick. "What ees 'quin,' Mike?"

Mike choked over a chicken bone, dug deeply with a forefinger and got it out, but not until his cheeks were wet with tears from the choking.

"A quin," he said hoarsely, "ees—a quin ees—you damfool, a quin is w'at takes a jack."

"A seester from a keeng?"

"Sure."

"Mm-m-m-m-m. She's like good cook cheeken, eh?"

"Sure."

"Shut up," growled Mendez. "I'm want theenk."

"Sure," grunted Dick, and then with inspiration. "You say w'at you wan' theenk, and I'm 'elp you, Porfiro."

"I don' want no brain from you!" snapped Mendez.

"All right—onkle," grinned Mike.

"Some day," said Mendez severely, "I'm cut off your damn head and run you out from Mejico. Who are you? *Ladron!* 'Orse t'ief! And you try mak' fun from Lobo Mendez."

Mike subsided. He realized that he had overstepped a little. Mendez swelled out his cheeks and grew very red in the face, as he glowered at his low-bred cousins who would dare poke fun at him.

"W'en you spik to me—spik *español,*" he ordered. "You spik Englis' like damn Basque sheepherder."

They both nodded, but did not agree with Mendez. Cutthroats and horse-thieves they were, but proud of their English-speaking ability. Still, it was not policy to anger their patron cousin further; so they confined themselves to finishing the chicken and wine, while Lobo Mendez picked his teeth with the point of a pocket-knife and appeared to be deep in thought.

CHAPTER IV.

"SHOT IN THE BACK!"

THE holdup and robbery of the Austin family caused considerable comment in Keno City. The sheriff and deputy found the place where the stage had been taken off the road and down a dry-wash. There were plenty of tracks in the sand; but it was deep sand which gave no idea of shape or size. The men had evidently kept their horses near there and rode away immediately.

Spook Allen had foolishly reached for his gun and received a bullet through his right shoulder, which did not break any bones, but incapacitated him for further driving for a while.

The descriptions of the two men were vague, as usual.

"Look for two men with masks on," said Smoky, "and if they've got two diamond rings between 'em—they're the men we want. What this office needs is more detective ability and less cross-country ridin'."

Frank Austin and Cal Sands came to Keno City, searching for Hal, but

Hal was not there. No one had seen him since they saw him leave for Silver Bar with Jigger Slade. Slade had told Smoky that he had been fired by Sands and was leaving the country. Austin asked Sands if this was true, and Sands said it was.

"Slade didn't want to take orders," he told Austin. "Of course, I didn't know you hired him. Neither of yuh ever told me anythin' about it."

"That's true," replied Austin. "But Slade didn't want anybody to know who he was. I hired him to come here and try to discover where my stock was going. I didn't know he was going to get a job on the ranch. In fact, I've only heard from him twice, and he mailed his letters in Silver Bar. I wrote him twice at Silver Bar, sending the letters to general delivery, and it may be that he either came over there to mail a letter to me or perhaps he knew I was coming in last night."

"He didn't trust anybody very much, did he?" smiled Sands.

"No, I guess he didn't," sighed Austin. "I must find out about—if there was anybody dependent on him. Under the circumstances, I feel duty bound to see that his death does not work a hardship on anybody."

"You can't blame Hal so much," replied Sands. "The sheriff saw it, and he said it was a case of self-defense."

"I understand that, but at the same time—well, I'll do what I can. I hope it doesn't become known, because if his mother ever finds it out—"

"That's right," agreed Sands. "She wouldn't understand."

Sands tried to dissuade Austin from going down to Indian Wells, but the big man insisted that he must find Hal and have a talk with him. It was a long, hot ride, and they arrived in Indian Wells at noon.

"We might as well eat at the Casa del Diaz," suggested Sands. "If Hal is down here we'll find him there. Anyway, it 'll give you a chance to see that Mexican girl. Their fried chicken and red wine is mighty good, and that old patio is the one cool place in Indian Wells."

"All right, Cal."

They tied their horses on the main street and walked back to the old adobe.

"I haven't been in Indian Wells for years," said Austin, "but it hasn't changed a bit. Used to be a mighty tough place in the old days."

"Yeah, and it's still a tough place," stated Sands. "More Mexican revolutions cooked up here than there is in Mexico. A killin' don't mean much down here. A knife between the ribs —and the buzzards pickin' yore bones down along a dry-wash."

Sands opened the front door and they stepped into the old *cantina*. There was only the Mexican cook, carrying some boxes into the kitchen. She spoke to them in Spanish, as Sands led the way out into the cool patio. The three Mexican musicians were lounging in their chairs, smoking cigarettes. but they reached for their instruments, at sight of the two patrons.

Sands threw his sombrero aside and sat down at a table. Austin drew back a chair, started to sit down, but straightened up slowly. Just outside a doorway, which opened into the patio, stood Rosita Diaz, looking at him with her wide, dark eyes. Austin was gripping the back of that chair, his knuckles turning white under the strain. Sands was paying no attention, being more intent on one of the guitar players, who had broken a string.

For several moments Rosita stared at Frank Austin, and then with a slow turn of her head, she walked back

through the doorway. Austin did not move, but his hand slowly relaxed on the chair, as the door closed behind her. He blinked his eyes, as though recovering from his trance, turned and sank wearily into his chair.

"KIND of a nice old place," said Sands, but Austin did not reply, and the three-piece orchestra broke into the well-known strains of "La Paloma."

Sands turned and looked at Austin.

"What's the matter?" he asked quickly. Austin shook his head, his lips shut tightly.

"Too much heat," grunted Sands. "I told yuh it was too damn hot to ride down here to-day. He-e-ey!" he yelled, hammering on the table.

"Don't," said Austin shakily. "I'm all right, Cal."

"Well, I'd like to have some water or some wine. You need a bracer, Frank."

Juana came in answer to Sands's call, and smiled at the foreman. Austin looked at her rather curiously.

"This is Mr. Austin, Juana," said Sands. "Will you bring us some water, and tell the cook to fry us some chicken. Yuh might bring us a bottle of wine at the same time."

Juana nodded and went to the kitchen. Austin turned to Sands.

"Is that the girl, Cal?"

"Yeah, that's Juana Diaz. Pretty, ain't she?"

Austin reserved his audible opinion, and Sands thought he was not interested.

"Does her mother run this place?" he asked.

"Sure. Rosita has run it for years. She's a queer one, Frank. Proud as the devil, though. She sure thinks a lot of Juana. I've known Rosita for three years, and she still calls me Señor Sands. Nobody ever gets well acquainted with Rosita—that is, white folks. That damn Lobo Mendez is her brother-in-law."

Juana came back with a pitcher of water, bottle of wine and glasses. Austin watched her slim, brown fingers, as she uncorked the bottle and poured out the wine. She looked up at him with a smile.

"You are Hal's papa?" she asked.

"Yes," said Austin quickly. "Do you know where he is now?"

"*Quién sabe?*" softly. "He was 'ere w'ile ago, but I think he go back to Keno City."

"Was he down here all night?" asked Sands.

Juana shrugged her shoulders. "How would I know? He came 'ere this morning."

"Probably didn't go to bed all night," said Sands. "You need somethin' a lot stronger than that wine, Frank. How about a little *tequila?*"

Austin shook his head.

"This is all right."

Juana placed the bottle on the table and walked back toward the *cantina.*

Sands watched her disappear and turned to Austin.

"I suppose a white man ought to stick with his own color, but I've wondered what kind of a wife a Mex girl would make for a white man. Most of 'em get fatter than the devil after they're about twenty-five. But look at Rosita. She's between forty and fifty, I'd bet; and look at her."

Austin was more interested in his wine, it seemed.

"Mighty few white girls as pretty as Juana," continued Sands. Austin looked up at him.

"Why don't you marry her, Cal?"

Sands laughed shortly. "One big

reason is—she probably wouldn't marry me."

"Cal, you marry her and I'll make you my partner in the Star A."

Sands looked curiously at Austin, trying to fathom his reason for such a generous offer.

"Sounds damn good," he said softly. "Might work out. I wonder how much she thinks of Hal?"

"That doesn't make any difference. Let me talk to Hal. He's through being wild, Cal—wild on my money."

"I think that killin' last night will tame him plenty," said Sands.

They went back to the main street, where they saw Hal and Lobo Mendez come from a *cantina* together. They talked for a few moments, and Lobo went on. Hal was about to enter the *cantina* again, when he saw his father and Sands.

"HELLO dad," he grinned, ignoring Sands entirely. They shook hands, eying each other seriously.

"We've had quite a time finding you," said his father evenly. "Is this any way to welcome your mother, father and sister?"

"No one told me you were coming. Slade came to Keno City and asked me if I didn't want to ride over to Silver Bar. He said there was some one coming in on the night train; some one he wanted to see. He told me that Sands had fired him, and that he wasn't coming back to the ranch. Sands, did you tell him that dad was coming in?"

"I did not," denied Sands. "Omaha knew it, and Omaha might have told him. I know I didn't."

"Well, it doesn't matter," stated Austin. "I want to talk with you alone, Hal."

"I'll meet you at the horses," said Sands, and entered the *cantina*.

"I'm taking you back to San Francisco," said Austin.

"Changing your views, eh?" smiled Hal.

"After the reports I've had on you—yes."

"Reports from Cal Sands," said Hal angrily. "I was supposed to be tied to his belt, but the string busted. Isn't that the whole trouble?"

"You've been drinking and raising hell in general."

"I've been drinking—yes. I don't know exactly what Sands wrote you, but I suppose he told you I was running around with a Mexican girl."

"Wasn't that true?"

"I took her to a dance in Keno City, and was the envy of every man there—especially Sands. He's a big, black four-flusher—and I told him so. If I was running the Star A, I'd boot him off the ranch so damn quick—"

"That's enough, Hal. You get your horse and ride back to the ranch with us."

"Yes, I'll do that; I want to see mother and Betty. But I'll not stay there as long as Sands is foreman. No, dad, it can't be done. I'm not big enough to whip him with my hands, but old man Colt evened things—"

"Drop that talk, Hal! I should think one killing would—"

"Sands told you that, did he?" interrupted Hal. "I thought he would."

"It isn't any secret, is it?"

"From the way they railroaded me out of Silver Bar, I thought it was. Well, all right. Cal Sands wrote you a lot of lies, and that's why you came. Now that you're here, I know why; so this morning I asked Juana to marry me to-day."

"You're not!" snapped Austin.

"I know it. But that doesn't alter the fact that I wanted to marry her."

"I'm glad I came when I did," grunted Austin, mopping off his brow with a handkerchief. "You're going back to the ranch with us, and from there you go to San Francisco."

"Suppose I decided to stay here?"

"I guess you won't do that."

"But just suppose I did?"

"Don't talk like a fool Hal."

"I'm of age, you know."

"Granted," came coldly from the older man. "You just try staying here. I'll cut off your income right now, and from this time on, you're not of my family. Forty a month as a cow-puncher wouldn't appeal much, eh? I doubt if you could get that much. No, I guess you'll go back to San Francisco and behave yourself."

"I'll go back to the ranch with you," said Hal stubbornly, "but I'll make no promises for the future."

Austin's jaw set tightly, as they started back up the street. Then—

"You might like to know that Slade was a detective, hired by me."

"Was he? Who else knew it?"

"Not a soul."

HAL laughed shortly, but made no further comments. They met Sands at the horses, and rode out the North road toward Keno City. Austin could see that his son disliked Sands as greatly as he had indicated; so he rode between them and talked to Sands. They were discussing some of the former work at the ranch, and Slade's name was mentioned. Sands glanced at Hal, and the youngster flared up instantly.

"It's too bad dad came when he did. You would have had a chance to write a swell report on that shooting, Sands —judging from the other reports you've turned in against me."

"Stop it, Hal," warned his father.

"They needed a victim," said Hal bitterly, "so they picked on me, because I was too drunk to know what was going on. Slade and I never quarreled; and as far as shooting him in self-defense is concerned—rot. Slade wasn't drunk and I can—"

"Wait a minute," cautioned Sands. "This has gone far enough, Hal. I'm sorry this had to come up again, Frank; but I suppose I've got to tell the truth. If it wasn't that Hal is your boy he'd be in jail right now. Nolan made it out a case of self-defense, but he told me later that Slade never even had a chance to draw his gun. Nolan had to square it with the bartender in that saloon, because the bartender knew what really happened."

"Cal, is that true?" asked Austin.

"It's a dirty lie!" snapped Hal.

"It's the truth," swore Sands. "Slade was shot in the back."

"In the back? My God!" Austin's face went white, as he swerved his horse in closer to Hal. "Hal, you didn't shoot him in the back!"

"Do you believe that?" asked Hal.

"What can I believe? The sheriff—"

Hal drew up his horse and turned the animal around.

"Some day I'm going to kill you, Sands," said Hal Austin. "Watch out for me, when we meet again." To his father he said only, "You can explain all this to mother and Betty. You believe it is the truth, and maybe they'll believe it, too. *Adios.*"

He spurred his horse and went galloping back down the road toward Indian Wells, leaving his father staring after him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Man Who Put Out the Sun

"As surely as the sun will rise to-morrow" goes the saying—but that day the sun did not rise, and the blinded world was at the mercy of a merciless scientific madman

By MURRAY LEINSTER

Author of "The City of the Blind," "The Storm That Had to Be Stopped," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

THE MORNING THE SUN DIDN'T RISE.

MAY the fifth was scheduled to be Police Inspector Hines's wedding day, but it happened that on that morning the sun did not rise, and so the wedding was postponed.

Otherwise it was just like every other morning. There were no storms, no earthquakes, no unusual phenomena of any kind. A great many people, as a matter of fact, simply disbelieved their clocks when they got up and therefore yawned and went back to bed again.

Others, checking up with the telephone company's time, reasoned sensibly that there was an eclipse or something of the sort, and searched the morning newspapers for details while they breakfasted by artificial light. But the morning newspapers, at least

With infinite care he removed the pear-shaped bomb

on the Atlantic Coast, bore only their usual quotas of divorces, embezzlements, ax murders and other diverting narratives. Having been printed during the night, they were entirely silent about the sun's eccentric absence. So it was quite a few hours before people became really alarmed.

Probably the first man in the United States to notice any oddity in the morning was a man wearing a green celluloid eyeshade, in the operating office of New York's gigantic uptown power station. He has no importance in the affair other than that priority.

He sat in a very brilliantly lighted office with a huge instrument board before him, on which were vast numbers of dials. A recording ammeter ticked away at his left, tracing a graph of current-consumption for one-half of the whole city. A master voltmeter and a visual master ammeter were just before his eyes.

There were windows on two sides of the room. Through them he could look out over the sleeping city. Long rows of unwinking street lights glittered in deserted avenues. The forms of the East River bridges were outlined in lines of fire. The city was silent and still, sleeping heavily. What few noises came from the empty streets seemed extraordinarily loud.

The man with the green eyeshade opened a window and took grateful breaths of the cool morning air. He was in his shirt sleeves, with his vest unbuttoned. It was hot in the office, with that peculiarly dry and stuffy heat with which we Americans fill our office buildings.

From far below, in the vast halls of the power station, there came a con-

stant subdued, contented humming. Turbine-driven dynamos purred softly, making the electric current which supplied alike the street lamps and the buildings of half the city.

FROM the other windows he could see toward the east, over the sprawling bulk of Brooklyn toward the sea. There was a faint, pale-grayish glow in the sky. False dawn. Stars began to dim against its brightness. Gradually, very gradually, the dark shapes of buildings began to take form. There were no colors in the sky as yet, merely a subdued gray radiance. But a paler reflection of that pale gray light made rectangular shapes out of irregular bulks.

From the windows of the operating office the city ceased to be a pattern of glittering lights against the dark. It acquired a third dimension. Perspectives developed, and it was possible to discover that this dim, ungainly shape was nearer or farther away than that one.

The man with the green eyeshade—his name does not matter—lowered the window and went back to his seat. It was his task to forecast the demand of the city for power, and to see to it that there were always humming steel monster dynamos in readiness to supply that force.

An easy task, ordinarily. Framed upon the wall at his left, a typical graph of the city's consumption of electricity showed the normal use of current. From six to eight at night, when people dined and electric signs flared, and all dwellings were lighted up, the demand was at its peak. Then more lights burned. More cooking devices functioned. More current was consumed by all the contrivances of an electrified civilization.

The downtown power station had a lesser peak at this hour, but its greatest load came when electrically-driven power devices of lofts and factories were operating. Uptown, the peak load came from homes.

The man in the operating office rested his hand conveniently near a certain switch. It would signal for the cutting off of certain dynamos, assigned to run the street lighting system. He waited for those lights to be extinguished. He did not look out the window for his information, but at his master ammeter. When that needle flickered back to the normal indication for this hour, the dynamos below would cease to run until needed again. Most of the monster machines were idle now, anyhow.

Presently there would come a slow creeping upward, when a myriad early risers turned on lights for their dressing. The master ammeter would record that activity. And then ten thousand electric toasters would perform their function, beginning with half an hour after sunrise, and from then on would come the steady increase in the amount of current used, until ten o'clock would see the last electric dish-washing device turned off; and the normal load of elevators, curling irons, and other trivia would require only two giant generators to run until the noon hour approached.

The man with the green eyeshade waited. The needle held steady. The street lights had not been turned off. Presently there was a slow climb upward. A myriad early risers, wakened by their alarm clocks, had turned on their lights. Time passed slowly. The load increased again. Electric toasters were functioning, and eggs were being boiled.

The man in the operating office of

the uptown power station could follow the activities of a city by watching a single giant dial. But he was frowning a little. The load was increasing. There was no drop. His eyes sought a clock at hand. Just the time for sunrise. The load continued to increase.

FROWNING, he shifted his hand and swung another switch. A hitherto silent, idle monster below began to hum contentedly. Watching the dial, presently he threw another switch. Still another began to purr, down in the echoful open space where metal monsters lay quiescent.

A telephone rang beside him. He spoke impatiently.

"I don't know. That's what the load calls for." He lifted his eyes and searched a row of circuit ammeters. "No. Everything's all right. If you have to start up another boiler, better go ahead."

A few minutes later, frowning more markedly than before, he lifted the instrument and called himself.

"Get three extra boilers ready. I'm going to need them unless the load falls off."

He watched his instruments in frowning, concentrated attention. He was entirely too busy to glance out of the window. Twice he looked at a clock and at the graph on the wall. Three times the normal demand for power at this time. Now four times.

He called for more boilers to supply steam. Discipline in the power plant is as strict, of course, as in any naval vessel. Orders are obeyed. More and more of the metal monsters whirred and whined and purred themselves into a contented humming.

Eight o'clock. The man with the green eyeshade bit at his nails. Then he looked out of the window. Three seconds of incredulous gazing, and he picked up the telephone instrument.

"Prepare for peak loading," he said curtly. "There's an eclipse or something. It's still dark outdoors."

And from then on he glanced at the windows as often as at his instruments. It was dark outside. At eight o'clock in the morning the street lights of New York were glittering jewels set in rows. The East River bridges were limned in lines of glowing lights. Puzzled people began to appear upon the streets. Store fronts were lighted. Windows in apartments and in private homes began to glow in vivid small rectangles.

At half past eight the man in the green eyeshade raised the window and stared shakenly upward. The sky was a dull, dead, velvety black. No stars were visible. No trace of illumination; no faintest ray of light came down from above. The city lived and moved and had its being in what would have been an entirely normal fashion—for night-time. Nothing at all had happened. Nothing whatever had occurred. The only oddity that could be discovered anywhere was simply the fact that on that morning the sun had not risen.

CHAPTER II.

A WORLD IN DARKNESS.

NOT everywhere did the phenomenon of darkness make its appearance so quietly. In London a bright sunshiny morning had been in being. The streets were filled with traffic. Children played in Kensington Gardens. Small tugs puffed importantly up and down the rather inadequate Thames.

In the houses of Parliament an im-

passioned debate was going on upon the subject of the manorial rights surviving in the village of Muttle Deeping, West Harborough, Hants. At the palace, a popular member of the royal family was in the act of entering a motor car to lay his fourth cornerstone for the week. London was, it is clear, in the middle of a normal, sunshiny morning.

Then the sky flickered, and all at once it was night. The sky was a dead, jet black. For a moment the city was stunned, before motor car headlights flamed into being. Two minutes later electric light bulbs began to glow in buildings. They dimmed, however, as the drain upon the power houses grew far more swiftly than the dynamos could be prepared to meet the load.

It was half an hour before the street lamps began to glow dully, and over an hour and a half before the city was illuminated as in a normal night, by which time the first and natural explanation of an eclipse in being was patently untrue. No eclipse ever lasted so long. And panic swept over London and all England.

In Budapest the darkness fell at high noon. In Madrid at eleven. At Stamboul — Constantinople — the sky was blotted out while myriads of the faithful bowed in prayer. In Calcutta the colors of the sunset were wiped out by an instantaneous curtain of utter darkness.

At Flagstaff, Arizona, an astronomer was peering patiently through a giant telescope at the planet Mars when the planet and all the stars beyond abruptly seemed to cease to be. He thought the telescope had met with some accident. Even later, when from the outside of the observatory the whole sky was seen to be blotted out, he still thought the obscuration due to an extremely heavy bank of clouds. But he puzzled bewilderedly over the suddenness of their forming.

Professor Schaaf was probably the first man in the whole world to evaluate the phenomenon at its true value. As May the fifth was the wedding day of his bosom friend Hines, Schaaf had spent the previous night at his flat, to listen patiently to the advantages of matrimony. He had shooed Hines benevolently to bed at two in the morning, and had slept peacefully himself. But at seven Schaaf was awake and found it dark outside.

The scientist looked at his watch and blinked, and listened to its ticking. He got up and stared out over the city, illuminated as if at midnight and already stirring. He saw the bright ribbon of an elevated train, several blocks away. He could see that it was filled with people.

He went to the telephone and called the apartment telephone operator. The Negro's voice came up gladly:

"Ya-as, suh, Professuh Schaaf! Seben o'clock. But, professuh! Ah wish yo'd tell me 'bout dishere eclipse. Hit's dark outside, suh. How long's the eclipse goin' to last, suh? Sev'l of the tenants done asked me a'ready, suh."

Schaaf grunted, and turned around to squint out of the windows again.

"Der deffil! Hm... Giff me der Meteorological Bureau. Find der number and call me back. I find out."

He padded to a window in carpet slippers. He heard Hines breathing evenly and regularly in the next room. Schaaf raised a window and stared up at the sky. An even, velvety black. No variation anywhere. As black as ink—blacker. Blacker than the darkness of an eclipse, because even during the moments of totality the stars can be

seen. And starlight even upon a thick blanket of clouds would give more light than this.

Schaaf put down the window, blinking. He stood quite still, a disreputable figure in dressing gown and slippers, with his luxuriant blond beard uncombed. And suddenly his eyes opened very wide, and he began to swear softly to himself.

HE went back to the telephone.

"Der Meteorological Bureau? Professor Albert Schaaf speaking. Will you giff me der bolometer reading of der moment? . . . Der *bolometer* reading! Der amount of heat being radiated to der earth from der sky! Yes!"

He fumed and fretted while the telephone receiver was silent. Then he became intent.

"Yes... Hm... That is larger than a night reading, *hein?* . . . What would be der reading during der moments of totality of an eclipse? . . ."

He shook his head impatiently. "Nefer mind der corrections for latitude. Abbroximate! Giff me der figures!"

Again he fumed nervously.

"Fery well. Thank you. Abbroximately one-fourth der normal amount of heat is being radiated to der earth from der sky. Which is too much for an eclipse, and fery much too much for night-time. I thank you. I thought I was cuckoo in der head."

He hung up the receiver and swore classic German profanity while he jiggled the hook.

"Der *verdammt* deffil!" he said bitterly; then, into the telephone: "Get police headquarters at once. Hurry!"

He scowled at the universe, represented by a section of Hines's library wall, until a voice answered.

"Hello!" he said savagely into the transmitter. "This is der Herr Professor Albert Schaaf. You know me?"

A prompt affirmative came over the wire. In those few circles where Schaaf was unknown on his own account—few indeed after his notable part in battling the scientific fiend Preston—he was known as a friend of Police Inspector Hines, who had directed those fights.

"Now listen carefully. I am in Hines's apartment. He is still asleep. I haff not wakened him because he is going to need sleep before this thing is finished. But I giff an order in his name. Send some police at once to giff adequate protection to Miss Kathryn Bush, who is to marry Inspector Hines to-day. I haff reason to think she is in danger. Send them at once, and send plenty of them! You understand?"

A grunt of astonishment at the other end of the wire. Then the incisive voice of a man of action.

"Good!" said Schaaf, nodding into the telephone transmitter. "Fery good. And then if you haff more men to spare, send them up to watch ofer Hines and me. We need them. And speed is der essence of der contract."

The incisive voice asked a question.

"Think!" said Schaaf sardonically. "Look out of der window and think, if you can, of one man who makes a specialty of raising hell with der heafens, and who has no fondness for Hines and me. That is der answer. Good-by!"

He hung up decisively, drummed nervously on his knee, and called Kathryn Bush. She was not only Hines's fiancée, she was a very capable newspaper woman, and Schaaf alternately scolded and flattered her outrageously. He liked Kathryn very much, and since Hines was going to

marry somebody, Schaaf approved his choice.

Her voice came clearly, hurried and uneasy.

"Hello! What is it?"

"Miss Bush," began Schaaf apologetically, "I am sorry that I am not Hines, but—"

"I'm leaving now," said Kathryn in a strained voice. "How is he, Professor Schaaf? Is he conscious yet?"

Sweat stood out suddenly on Schaaf's forehead.

"*Gott in Himmel!*" he said unsteadily. "I am just in time! Miss Bush! What kind of message haff you got? Hines is all right. There is nothing wrong. What haff you heard?"

Her voice—doubtful and desperately anxious—came over the wire, "Your note said there'd been an explosion and you both were hurt—"

"It is a forgery!" snapped Schaaf. "For der lofe of Gott, do not leafe your apartment! Call to der police! Raise der deffil! But stay where you are! Did you not look out of der window?"

There was a little pause, and he heard her gasp of amazement.

"I—I was awakened by the message," she said unsteadily, "and I didn't think of anything. . . . It's Preston, isn't it?"

"Der bolometer-reading has his name on it," said Schaaf grimly. "I haff telephoned der police to go to your house at once. I haff not waked up Hines, because I just found out what has happened. It must be der Heaviside Layer gone cuckoo. Stay where you are!"

"I will. I—I'm glad you telephoned."

"And so am I," said Schaaf from his heart. "You will telephone, Miss Bush, efery few minutes until der police come? They are on der way, but it may be minutes yet before you are safe. I am going to wake up Hines now."

"A-all right," said Kathryn. "Don't be afraid for me."

He heard the click of her receiver on its hook. And Schaaf wiped great droplets of sweat from his face.

"That deffil," he said unsteadily. "Oh, that damned deffil!"

HE went padding into Hines's bedroom and shook the sleeping man. Outside, the world was dark save for a multitude of electric bulbs, which pierced the darkness with the effect of magic. Elevated trains were roaring all over the city, now. The people of the cities of the Atlantic coastline took the sun's absence with a quite astounding calmness. They classed the darkness as that of an eclipse, and thousands of offices opened, and hundreds of factories began their work with nearly full forces of workers on hand, though the telephone switchboards were nearly swamped with vain demands on the newspaper offices and weather bureau for information they did not have.

In his bedroom, Hines sat up and blinked, and was wide awake. He grinned at Schaaf.

"Good morning! This is my wedding day, isn't it?"

"I haff my doubts," said Schaaf soberly. "Hines, damned near der worst has happened. Breston is on der job again."

Hines was on his feet in seconds. "Kathryn—?"

"Is all right," said Schaaf. "I telephoned her minutes ago. She is all right and she is going to stay all right. Look out of der window and then at der clock."

Hines stared blankly. Brightly lighted streets. Brilliantly illuminated stores. Elevated trains like streamers of fire, moving along distant steel trestles. Eight o'clock in the morning, and the sky was black with an utter, unrelieved blackness.

"But—it's night!" said Hines blankly.

"*Verdamm!*" said Schaaf impatiently. "Of course it is night! Night in der morning." He dropped into one of the wholly incongruous slang phrases that adorned his speech. "You are darned tooting it is night, Hines! Der sun did not rise this morning."

"The — sun — did — not — rise — this morning," said Hines slowly. "I—see."

The telephone rang shrilly. Hines started, and moved to answer it, while Schaaf stared out at the incredible darkness that lay upon the world, hours after daylight should have appeared.

His identification of the darkness with a man named Preston was not an accident, of course. There was just one man in the world who could cause meteorological disturbances on a large scale, and the three previous disturbances of Preston's creation had been somewhat like this.

It was one of Schaaf's bitternesses that he had unwittingly helped in the development of the apparatus which had done so much harm. More than a year before, he had done some highly abstruse technical research for an electrophysicist named Preston. Schaaf's share had been the determination of the mass and dimensions of the ionized bodies in atmospheric air.

He had done that work, not guessing the devilish application to be made of it, for his fare back to his native Germany, since there seemed to be no room for a theoretic physicist in the United States. But before he sailed, he had been drafted by his present friend Hines to combat the danger his measurements had enabled Preston to create.

Using Schaaf's figures in his basic calculations, Preston had developed a way to make the air opaque, black, as horribly black as the ocean's deepest abyss. And he had done it. To be sure, heretofore he had confined his blackness to the surface of the earth, but that dull, dead, velvety sky overhead was like nothing as much as the darkness Preston produced.

Schaaf did not know what Preston had done now, or how he had done it, but that Preston was responsible he was sure.

THERE was a sudden blaring of horns down in the street. Minutes later, the clang of the elevator door outside the apartment. Then the doorbell.

Schaaf opened the door cautiously, with Hines's service revolver in the pocket of his dressing-gown pointed and ready. There were men in uniform in the hall, with only two figures in civilian clothes, one of whom carried a tripod and camera. Schaaf fixed those two with a distinctly unpleasant expression.

"Grab those two persons, please," he said shortly, "and bring them inside here. Inspector Hines will talk in a fery few seconds."

Hines hung up, smiling grimly, as they all crowded within. He nodded.

"That was Kathryn," he said briefly. "Thanks, Schaaf!"

The words said little. The tone said a great deal. Schaaf rumbled in his beard and indicated the sputtering civilians. One of them was snarling.

Hines regarded them with a grim meditativeness.

"Who are these two men?" he asked softly.

"Lookin' for you, sir," said a sergeant of police, woodenly. "When Professor Schaaf called up for a detail to come up at once, sir, he said you were in danger. And these men were just asking for you at the switchboard downstairs, sir, and they tried to bolt—"

"I'm a reporter for the *Messenger*," snapped one of the two angrily, "and this man is one of our staff photographers. There's some talk that Preston's back of the sun not rising, and we came here to ask—"

Hines nodded pleasantly.

"Ah!" he said softly. "But reporters don't talk like that. If you were really a reporter you'd say, 'I'm from the *Messenger*' or maybe that you were 'on the *Messenger*,' but never that you were a reporter 'for the *Messenger*.' Never! Search 'em, sergeant!"

A search of the suddenly blaspheming man disclosed a pair of heavy automatics and no newspaper credentials whatever. The supposed photographer yielded the same, with a pair of brass knuckles as additional armament.

Hines smiled.

"It looks as if you two men came from Preston. You may be interested to hear that the attempt to kidnap Miss Bush has failed, and the taxi driver who waited below for her has been pinched. He's going to talk. Are you two going to tell what you know?"

The pseudo-reporter snarled and shut his lips tightly. He stared meaningly at the other man. The other man shook his head. Hines watched the by-play.

"Sergeant, I seem to remember that you were on the bomb squad once. That camera seems to be unusually heavy. Suppose you open it up—carefully?"

The sergeant lifted the camera, turned it this way and that, and began to use a penknife. He handled the thing gingerly after the first two or three incisions. Minutes later, with a grunt of satisfaction, he laid down a pear-shaped bomb upon the table. Dangling from it there was the exposure device, which here evidently functioned as a means of setting it off.

THE two men in civilian clothes regarded the thing in gray-faced stupefaction. Hines looked at them. One of them tried to speak, and could not.

"You see," said Hines shortly, "it's a bomb. If you'd pulled the trigger, it would have blown us all to bits. But especially you. If I know Preston, he told you it was some kind of gun. Eh?"

The photographer croaked, abandoning all pose of innocence: "He tol' us it was a trick machine gun, an' if we sprayed y' wit' it—"

"At a guess," said Hines dryly, "it's combined high explosive and poison gas. That would seem logical. If I wasn't killed by the explosion, the gas would get me. You two men would be finished either way. A much better bet than a machine gun . . . How much were you to get for standing behind this thing and setting it off?"

The pseudo-reporter cursed horribly.

"Ten grand, damn his soul!" he raged. "And him sending us to bump ourselves off—"

"I'll give you ten grand," said Hines evenly, "for the dope on where to find him. Ten grand, and immunity."

"All I know," said the photographer hoarsely, "is he give us five grand ahead o' time an' said we'd get the rest if we croaked yuh. We don't know where he's at. We seen him yesterday in Brooklyn."

"Right," said Hines. "Tell me where and when you saw him, and you go clear."

The two men gave an address, and, to a second question, the time of their talk. Hines went to the telephone and asked for a number.

"All right, sergeant," he said impatiently, while he waited. "Turn 'em loose. And you two men remember there's ten grand in it for you if you get him. There's that much for anybody that gets him. And you'll get well taken care of if you tip off the man who gets him. Clear out!"

The two men stumbled to the door, too much shaken by the knowledge that they had been intended to blow themselves to bits, to be incredulous about their release.

Hines got his connection, in Brooklyn. He ordered a raid at once, with a succinct statement that Preston—who was sufficiently well known by name to the police and the nation at large—had been there the day before. He stood up.

"Why did you turn them loose?" demanded Schaaf irritably.

The doorbell rang. Hines nodded to a policeman to open it, and said dryly:

"Those two men spreading that offer and news of Preston's double crossing are a lot more useful out of jail than in. . . . What 've we got here?"

Three messenger boys had arrived simultaneously with sheafs of telegrams, radios, and cables. The extraordinary nightfall had been reasoned out in six nations as possibly an extension of certain previous events in the United States. The cables were mostly addressed to Schaaf, and were from every variety of scientific body and government authority, reporting the sudden falling of darkness and asking if he could explain its cause or possible duration.

Schaaf opened the first of them and swore. He opened more, and swore more luridly. He was sputtering German profanity in a steady stream before he reached the end of them. He looked up, still in his dressing-gown and slippers, and with his blond beard bristling in every direction, to find the room empty of police and Hines hunched over the telephone, talking quietly.

"Better get some clothes on, Schaaf," said Hines. "Kathryn's coming over here. We're going down to my office."

Schaaf scowled at him.

"Hines," he said hopelessly, "der *verdammt* scoundrel has cofered der whole world with darkness! I know what it is, of course. Fife to fifteen miles up in der air, all ofer der earth, there is a layer of ionization. It is der Heaviside Layer, which raises der deffil with wireless telegraphy. Breston has somehow managed to penetrate it, and he has filled it with an electric field which makes der air *no longer transparent*. Der whole world is in darkness, and there is no way in which we can possibly locate der sending-station. Because he has practically charged der entire roof of der world with darkness. What are we going to do?"

Hines grinned.

"I've already got him located within a couple of hundred miles," he said dryly. "Get busy finding out what he's

got, and I'll find where he is, and together we'll settle him."

CHAPTER III.

TO STEAL A WORLD.

THE morning passed in unbroken darkness. Traffic thickened, grew dense, and thinned out again. Two million people, balked of information from the usual sources, were asking two other million people what they thought about the darkness, and the second two million were telling the first that they didn't know what to make of it, but so-and-so was going down to the office and there was no use being docked for absence.

Crowds filled the subway platforms and the elevated trains, and other crowds swarmed up and down from the rapid-transit stations and split up into infinitesimal fragments which coalesced at the entrances to office buildings, and always the topic of conversation was the extraordinary, inexplicable continuation of night.

Modern civilized man, however, pays the very minimum of attention to the natural part of his environment. There are literally hundreds of thousands of people in New York who are outdoors less than one hour in twenty-four. To those people the absence of daylight was an extremely trivial matter. Something to be puzzled about and something to ask questions about, but not especially anything to be worried about.

In the lesser cities of the United States, of course, the darkness loomed more largely. In the small towns it was a matter of immediate and overwhelming importance. In the villages it produced apprehension bordering on panic. On the farms it was stark tragedy. But on the whole the matter was taken with a surprising calmness. If it was a precarious sort of composure, likely to break into mob hysteria at any moment, it was nevertheless composure.

But the darkness held for hour after hour, unbroken and menacing. Ten o'clock arrived. Half past ten. Eleven. The sky remained a jetty black. The temperature of the air fell below the daunting chill which normally fills the small hours before dawn.

People in the offices and factories had worked almost gayly at first, taking the use of artificial light in daytime as a sort of adventure. But as time went on and the unwontedly protracted night continued, little groups gathered at windows, staring out uneasily.

The interchange of questions about the darkness ceased to be jocular. The adventure became serious. Concern deepened to apprehension. More and more offices were quietly closed for the day. More and more factories announced a holiday. A stream of homeward-bound folk began to crowd the elevated trains and subways.

The newspaper extras were late in getting out, and Hines, coöperating and conferring with the Washington authorities, was responsible. He had put police on guard at the publishing offices, and would not let one copy of the newspapers leave the publishing plants until he had made provision for the public reaction.

The subway and elevated lines ed to be prepared for a monster homeward rush. Traffic squads needed to be reënforced. The reserves of the police department posted themselves at strategic points, the elevated and subway lines prepared for a jam, and the newspapers were unleashed.

All over the city a chorus of voices was upraised, crying extra editions. In ten thousand office buildings the elevators became jammed with folk going down to buy them. And the subway tunnels roared and rumbled with empty trains rushing down town to carry back the mob that within minutes would be fighting for places.

The newspapers were much alike, though Kathryn Bush's story in the *Star* was naturally the one which gave the fullest account. All the papers, however, had reasonably complete accounts of the phenomenon. This was no time to play favorites. And nearly all of them printed Schaaf's explanation in full. He had lectured for nearly half an hour in Hines's office at police headquarters, and his explanation—though given so promptly—still holds good.

"LAST year," said Schaaf, "there was a sudden flood of darkness on Fifth Afenue, and there were many robberies. Hines and myself, we discofered that a deffil named Breston had done it. He had learned that under der influence of certain fery short Hertzian wafes, der air ceases to be transparent. Actually, it was der phenomenon of der fluorescence of der ionized bodies in der atmosphere, when they absorbed all der fisible colors of light and emitted infisible ones instead.

"Der essential thing is that der air is opaque, there is no light. Now, three times, so far, those short short wafes haff been used. Once on Fifth Afenue. Once der whole city was made dark. Some few months ago Breston created a storm in der Catskill Mountains by means of der fact that when der air is no longer transparent it absorbs der heat of der sun, becomes hot, and rises in huge folumes."

All this, of course, was ancient history. Everybody knew it. The Storm That Had to be Stopped was one of the most distressing catastrophes in the history of the United States.

"Now, at der time of der Storm," Schaaf went on bitterly, "when we got to der sending-station which sent out der short short wafes, we blew it to pieces and der storm stopped. But der apparatus for making those short short wafes had had thermit and explosifes placed about it, so that it was destroyed. Breston did that. Also we found der body of a man, burned with der explosifes and der thermit. Der newspapers printed that it was the body of Breston. We hoped it was so. But later infestigation profed that it was not. Breston is fife feet three inches tall. Der dead body was fife feet nine inches tall.

"For months past, Inspector Hines has been defoting all his time to a search for Breston. And I haff worked on der problem of combating der short wafes. *Himmel!* How I haff worked! But in both cases, Breston has so far kept ahead of us. This morning's darkness is of Breston's contrifance. But we haff licked him three times before, we will lick him again, and anything that he says to der contrary is banana oil!"

SO far, Schaaf was quoted verbatim. But the rest of his lecture was expanded in most of the papers, because Schaaf's mixture of technical terms and slang was confusing. The essence of his explanation, though, was very simple.

To make the earth's whole atmosphere opaque would have required millions of billions of horse-power. But far above the surface of the earth the Heaviside Layer in the atmosphere seemed as if made for Preston's pur-

poses. From five to fifteen miles up there is an abrupt change in the characteristics of the air. At that height there is a layer of highly ionized air, markedly electrically conducting, which spreads over the whole earth. Schaaf likened it to a roof of conducting metal over the whole earth.

It was clear that if the short short waves of Preston's discovery could be introduced into that conducting layer of the atmosphere, they would spread out over the whole earth with but little loss of power. Five thousand horsepower would do it.

"Der thing we do not yet understand," said Schaaf, "is how Breston manages to introduce his short short wafes into der Heaviside Layer. We will find it out, fery shortly. Breston cannot bring der darkness down to der surface of der earth, because he can haff power enough to darken only a small part of it, and der moment he does that we locate him, and when we locate him we kill him. And sooner or later we locate him anyhow!"

His expressed optimism was not altogether unfeigned, of course. He had the desperate certitude of a man who simply dares not admit the possibility of failure. At the moment that the newspapers were blazoning his announcement on their front pages, Schaaf was actually in something close to despair.

LONG, explorative fingers of light were poking upward toward the sky, from warships anchored in the harbor. Half a dozen giant ships of the Atlantic Fleet were in port. Army tanks had been loaned Hines to destroy Preston's storm-making apparatus, and all the resources of the government, of course, would be used to restore sunlight to the world again.

The harbor was smoothly rippling, almost oily on its surface. Long lights glimmered on its waves. Then, suddenly, from the flagship of the fleet there came three or four staccato detonations. Seconds later there were thin crackling explosions high overhead. The searchlights shot back and forth, searching the roof over the world.

A little later, three or four more explosions. After a longer interval, brittle detonations high above. The searchlights moved restlessly over the ebon ceiling of the earth. And still again came the sharp sound of an anti-aircraft gun firing at an empty sky.

The searchlights followed a thin thread of whitish vapor upward. It stretched like a kite-string toward the sky. It was the trail of tracer-smoke left by the anti-aircraft shell.

Blinkers began to operate on the ships. A man on shore spoke crisply into a telephone.

Schaaf got the message, frowning bitterly in his despair.

"Yes. I haff it. Thank you."

He was in Hines's office, waiting for the information. An anti-aircraft gun had fired time-fused shells to burst at progressively greater heights. The shell which burst at an elevation of forty-two thousand feet had been unseen, because its cloud of smoke had been formed inside the now opaque Heaviside Layer of the atmosphere. The layer of darkness which kept the whole world deep in night was eight miles above the surface.

"What can we do, Hines?" demanded Schaaf in despair. "Can we send an afiator up eight miles to do intricate obserfations with delicate apparatus? We cannot. Then how are we going to locate der point of dissemination of der *verdammt* darkness-producing wafes?"

Hines held up his hand, spoke quietly into a telephone. He was deathly pale, but Schaaf was too excited to notice it.

"We're coming along pretty well," said Hines grimly, "except that you've still got to find out more about Preston's weapons. I think I know, roughly, where he is."

Schaaf sat up and blinked.

"It's been apparent from the first that when we do locate Preston we have everything in our favor. We have an army we can fling against him, on land. We have aircraft to attack him by air. We can send the shells from fourteen inch guns against him from the sea. He knows all that."

Schaaf ran his fingers through his beard. "Shoot der works," he said harassedly.

"The President received a letter from him telling what his demands are going to be. Other governments have got similar letters. He's fighting the whole world, and he knows it. What weapons has he got?"

"Darkness," said Schaaf bitterly, "and storms, and a total lack of humanity."

"And we have all the other weapons. Where can he defend himself, with the weapons he has, if we do locate him?"

Schaaf scratched his chin, underneath his beard.

"Wherefer he is. Tell me, Hines."

"If he's on an island," said Hines, "he can't be attacked by an army. If he can blind any ship within twenty or thirty miles by making all the atmosphere—not only the Heaviside Layer—opaque to light, no ship can navigate to that island. And if he cuts the darkness on the rest of the world, he can make a storm that will sink any ship or wreck any aircraft in the world."

"He is on an island!" said Schaaf instantly. "Of course he is on an island! But where?"

"HE gave himself away," said Hines grimly. "He talked to his assassins, in Brooklyn, just fourteen hours before the darkness went on. And he wouldn't trust anybody else to work an affair the size of this, so he's at his darkness plant. At most he's not more than twelve hours from New York. More probably only ten. And the last eleven of those hours were night hours, and there are no night-flying passenger air lines out of the metropolitan district now. He traveled by train or boat or motor car. Averaging, he's not more than four hundred miles from New York if he made the longest part of his journey by train or car. He's probably not less than two hundred, for reasons of discretion. Here's a map. Draw the two circles—two hundred miles and four hundred miles away. We can block off the land between the circles. He isn't there. We can block off the area where there are no islands. If he needs to make a storm, he'll want to be on an island, not a steamer."

Schaaf looked at the area that was left.

"Der Maine coast!"

"Of course," said Hines. "And now remember he wants an island well out at sea so storms can sweep clear around it, and one that's fairly isolated, so he could have built his plant without attracting attention."

Schaaf scrutinized the map with painstaking care.

"Hm. This little speck looks promising, Hines."

Hines said grimly, "The police of all New England have been questioning fishermen. I mentioned that island

especially. Only one man has been near it recently. He was ordered off by guards who told him a rich man had bought it and was making a summer home on it. And so I've checked up, and it hasn't been sold, and the present owner knows nothing about guards there. And also, it isn't a rum-runner's rendezvous. What does that add up to?"

"Plenty!" said Schaaf exuberantly. "I take off der hat. I make der grand salaam! Now we go there and haff a *Schrecklichkeit* party; wait until night, because we do not want to haff him start a storm. And we line up der Nafy, and they take der sights, and there is a signal, and *bam, pow, biff,* and he is blooey! Blown off der map!"

Hines looked at Schaaf. And for the first time Schaaf saw how pale his friend was. His face was like a mask. He reached over his desk and tossed Schaaf a little envelope.

"I was to be married to-day," said Hines steadily. "Preston's men tried to kidnap Kathryn this morning, just as they tried to blow the two of us to bits. We beat the assassins, and Kathryn, thanks to you, Schaaf, escaped the trap that was set for her. We've been busy ever since. She wrote the account for the extra edition of the *Star*. We postponed our wedding as a matter of course."

Schaaf said suddenly, "Gott! Hines, you look like der deffil!"

"You blocked one attempt to kidnap Kathryn," repeated Hines evenly. "She went to the office of the *Star*. And another attempt was made three hours ago. The one thing she didn't expect was another attempt to kidnap her, made in exactly the same fashion as the first. This time it succeeded. Kathryn's disappeared. And I had a telegram from his man, sent from here in New York, saying that he's taking her direct to his headquarters. So she'll be killed if we kill Preston."

Hines moistened his lips and said with difficulty, "The—thing that makes it bad is that we were to have been married to-day."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LONGEST NIGHT IN HISTORY.

THE lights of the city glowed in long, long rows. The whiter arc-lights on the Jersey side of the Hudson glittered more palely, but all lights shone bright, in the longest night in history. The gigantic electric signs flamed their advertising slogans for the world to admire at three o'clock in the afternoon. The Hudson River day boat came downstream as a glittering mass of lights. Her searchlight shot out and she docked by its rays. There was a deep-toned roaring on the surface of the river. Another. A third. A fourth motor added its roaring hum to the din. Then the four roaring noises swept swiftly across the harbor waves and lifted suddenly, and rose into the darkness that overlay the world. Tiny navigation lights flashed on, and drifted across the empty black sky where sun or moon or stars should have been. They headed out toward Long Island Sound and vanished.

The city, left behind, went valorously on about its business. At three in the afternoon of the day that the sun did not rise, New York was perhaps typical of the whole civilized world. The more savage territories of the planet were sunk in panic, and pagan gods were passionately besought to give back the sun to the world again. In China the shrines were filled with the sounds of gongs and firecrackers. In

Soviet Siberia long-neglected chapels resounded to cries of *"Hospodi pomilui!"* Everywhere that men had temples, those temples were swarming masses of terror-stricken suppliants, pleading for the sun to come back again.

But New York was more typical of the more scientifically minded Occident. In one sense the terror was more acute, because New York had had bitter and repeated experience of Preston and his works. But Hines and Schaaf had said there was no more danger, that Preston had done his worst.

New York had learned, by now, that they knew what they were talking about. Therefore, while there was not complete confidence in their ability to beat Preston again, there was a definite knowledge of the cause of the darkness and a definite idea that the source of the darkness was being attacked. So that New York was frightened but hopeful; terrified, but not panic-stricken because of its belief in Hines and Schaaf.

People in New York, too, had no clear idea of the magnitude of the disaster that impended. As long as artificial light could be used, the average New Yorker considered the matter a nuisance and a cause for alarm, but no immediately dangerous matter.

He read his newspapers avidly, and the statements issued by various scientists consulted by the newspapers struck him as melodramatic in the same way that his newspaper headlines were always melodramatic. But he considered them quite as remote from his own life as his morning torch-fiend narratives.

The darkness was, however, a serious matter enough. Leaving aside the matter of illumination from the sun, the earth was receiving only one-fourth its normal daily supply of solar heat. The layer of darkness intercepted the rest. True, the part of the earth that should have been dark was losing less than its usual nightly amount of heat by radiation into interstellar space, but matters were bad enough anyhow.

The equator was receiving no more heat from the sun than southern Greenland normally receives. New York was receiving less than is normal at the north pole itself. Only the fact that the stored up warmth of the earth's surface layers was being lost very slowly, prevented an immediate drop to below zero temperatures.

But by three o'clock in the afternoon, when the four seaplanes took off for a search of the Maine coast, the official thermometer in the Meteorological Bureau of New York City showed forty-four degrees Fahrenheit—twelve degrees above freezing. The nearness of the ocean with its vast supplies of stored heat had prevented a greater drop.

Inland, the temperature fall was greater yet. A heavy snow was falling in Cleveland. In Butte, Montana, zero had actually been reached. It was not at all difficult to compute a progressive temperature loss which would average twenty degrees a day after the first twenty-four hours, and in one week would make the normally temperate zones uninhabitable and permit of glacier formation in the Panama Canal Zone.

In the face of such figures as this, estimates that two weeks' darkness would destroy all planted crops and cause inescapable famine, seemed hardly worth worrying about. Agricultural experts were pointing out that unless Preston was defeated or his terms met, the world would starve to

death. Sunlight is essential to vegetable growth, on which all life depends. But such fears, as a few physicists recognized grimly, were quite needless. Long before that catastrophe came about, mankind would not need to worry about planted crops. Long before the world went hungry, it would have frozen to death.

SCHAAF was sunk in a bitter gloom as the four planes roared northward. Big planes, they were. Three Navy bombers, carrying flares and bombs and radio, and the multi-passenger flying transport which carried Hines and Schaaf and an impressive array of apparatus for measurements and photography.

The glow against the black sky, which was New York, faded away against the horizon. Only, there was no horizon. Little pin-pricks of light showed beneath the speeding ships. There were three men in the transport beside Hines and Schaaf. The pilot and his relief, and a radio operator who spoke from time to time to the pilot.

Schaaf saw Hines looking at him and said gloomily, "We are doing radio nafigation. I haff nefer been so helpless; I know more about Breston's apparatus than anybody else in der world—and I do not know der beginning of it! How does he get his wafes into der Heaviside Layer? How does he do it?"

Hines shrugged. His face was a mask, dead white and quite expressionless.

"They must have got Kathryn through," he said irrelevantly. "I had a cordon out that I didn't think a fly could break through. Every road, every bypath covered. There was a destroyer fleet out of Boston, too, to pick up any launch. But they got her through. I don't know how."

Schaaf said helplessly.

"What are we going to do, Hines? Tell me!"

Hines spoke tonelessly, without expression.

"Preston found out his power by accident. At first, I suppose, he merely thought of getting rich by helping out in robberies. But then he found he could manipulate the stock market by turning on the dark. He tried that, and found he could make storms. And now—you know his terms for making the sun shine again?"

"They haff not been made public," growled Schaaf, "and I haff been busy."

"He demands the submission of all the nations of the earth. He is to be Emperor of Earth—or he'll let the earth freeze until the survivors make him their emperor." Hines shrugged. "He has some involved conditions. Every living man to swear allegiance. Some trick arrangement by which he'll always have a corps of his gangsters about a darkness transmitter somewhere, to keep the world cowed . . . Of course nobody is thinking of accepting his terms while there's a chance to fight. But there isn't much time."

"If he is on that Metinic Island," growled Schaaf, "we can mass artillery and ships and blow der whole damned thing to bits."

Hines fumbled for a cigar and smiled drearily. "Isn't it funny? Kathryn and I were to have been married to-day, and I'm massing artillery to blow Preston to bits—and she'll be blown to bits with him."

Schaaf swallowed something.

"Hines! *Gott*, Hines, I am sorry!"

"Don't be," said Hines. "I'm going to be on that island when it's destroyed

by shell fire. So don't be sorry for me."

THE planes flew steadily on through the darkness. Snow swirled about them for a while, and ceased. This was the afternoon of May the fifth. On the earth below, people were gazing hopelessly up at the sky of ebony. All over the world there was despair, as varied in its expression as the people who expressed it.

In Alabama, farmers moved along their cornfield rows with lanterns, watching the young shoots turning black with frost. There was frost as far south as Havana. In the western mountains, dry land farmers motored to the edges of mountain streams that had begun to flow freely. Now they were trickles again, flowing ever more slowly beneath a thickening shell of ice.

Men cursed the black sky that would not let the sun's warmth through. There was beach ice on the Great Lakes. A borax prospector in Death Valley saw by a thick miner's candle that there was a deposit of hoar frost even in that unbelievable place.

Everywhere human beings began to realize that darkness was not the worst of the evils upon them. The world was growing colder and ever colder beneath its sky of black. It was a dark world whose inky obscurity was broken only by the tiny yellow flames where yet hoping or desperately enduring people comforted themselves by the light it seemed would never come down from the sky again.

But the wild things had no comfort. Those creatures of the night which prey on others, at first moved freely. Bats soared in their erratic fashion until the increasing cold set them hunting their caves again. Owls swept abroad on noiseless wings. And some—not many—of the four-footed animals crawled or crept or slithered upon their private businesses.

But the other things lay hidden. Songbirds crouched in their nests while the night hung on interminably and the air grew icy. Little nestlings roused and chirped querulously from hunger. But night still remained. The age-old instincts, bred of terror, held the old birds still, though their young ones starved. And besides, to have left the nests after the cold increased would be to let the featherless young ones freeze.

There were very many small, bewildered tragedies in woods and forests and jungles while the darkness held.

FOUR planes roared on, ever northward, in their quest of the island where Preston had his stronghold. Gradually, the three bombers dropped down toward the earth. Gradually, the transport plane climbed. And then a signal came by radio. Schaaf grew tense and watchful. Hines grew grim and still, staring at the world of darkness all below. And then, quite suddenly, there was a vast, blinding glare below. A bomber had dropped a flare.

The sky above remained like ebony. The sea remained like ink. But there was a line of surf upon the sea, and an enormous glare beneath a swaying parachute, and three huge bombing planes in silhouette against a world all black and white.

Hines stared downward through powerful binoculars, focusing them quite calmly on the land beyond the surf.

"I see a man—two men, running," he said steadily.

The first ball of fire was dropping swiftly. A second bloomed suddenly, farther on. An island was made clear-

ly visible. An irregular, jagged shape, outlined by surf, with here and there a streak of white sand. Schaaf put his glasses to his eyes, and the earth seemed to leap toward him. Low, squat structures of a curiously ungainly form. A bowl-shaped apparatus ten feet or more across, made of wires which glittered in the unbearable light. And one other, incredible thing . . .

Schaaf blinked, and swore, and then shouted.

"I haff it!"

From the center of the island a column of solid, jetty black reared upward toward the sky. It was opaque, solid-seeming, and utterly black. It looked like the drooping tentacle of some colossal waterspout, anchored and moored. It looked like a throbbing hose through which darkness was being pumped upward to discolor the sky.

Schaaf babbled.

"Four-centimeter wafes! He has got der four-centimeter wafes! Oh, der clefer scoundrel! Der *verdammt* clefer scoundrel!"

On the island three men were running toward the bowl-shaped apparatus of wires. A third flare blazed vividly. In the big ship seven thousand feet up the aircraft camera clicked steadily, exposing plates and changing them and exposing more. The radio operator was working his key feverishly.

The three bombing planes circled and soared over the island. A fourth flare filled the world with light. And suddenly one of the monster flying things down below wheeled in its flight and dived savagely.

"Difing for der blackness-beam!" panted Schaaf. "Difing—"

Three men were working frantically about the bowl-shaped apparatus on the ground. The giant bomber showed clearly for an instant, as if poised before its suicidal dash against the apparently solid column of blackness reaching upward to the sky. It shot into that blackness—

The sky split open!

From horizon to horizon lurid flames flashed into being. The sea and the island and all the world was lit by an unbearable, a terrific glare. It seemed as if all the world were being destroyed in one vast explosion, the steam and fumes of which had already mounted colossally toward the zenith.

BUT there was no blast of sound. The sky closed once more. There was utter silence save for the loud droning of the motors outside the cabin of the big plane. Far below, three magnesium flares glittered brightly.

"Gawd!" said the radio operator, awed. "What was that?"

Hines said dryly: "That was daylight, my friend. The sunlight and clouds. That was what we expect to see for twelve hours every day."

Schaaf was muttering, while he rubbed his light-dazed eyes: "There was four thousand kilowatts in that beam. What happened?"

He peered down again. There was a sudden flaring upward of lurid yellow flames. The bomber that had dived into the darkness-beam had crashed, now, and was burning fiercely on a narrow beach.

"Get der other ships away!" snapped Schaaf suddenly. "Recall them! And we haff to go like der deffil! Quick!"

But he was too late. The bowl-shaped contrivance of glittering wires moved suddenly. A beam of blackness shot out from it. That blackness swept upward and enveloped a burning flare. The flare went out. The beam of darkness swept on, and the flare was a drip-

ping, swiftly falling mass of tiny yellow sparks. The beam swung sharply to one of the two remaining bombers. The plane dived and dodged, but the darkness caught it, enveloped it. The bomber dropped crazily out of the blackness, spitting sparks and burning. It crashed into the sea.

The third bomber was racing for safety. The beam shot toward it, and when it careened wildly to escape, expanded widely. It became an apparently solid object a hundred yards across. It closed over the bomber, and there was a terrific explosion. When the beam died away there was no falling, burning wreck. There was only a rain of small particles of débris.

"Go like der deffil!" snapped Schaaf. "Cut off der motors and glide! We haff to carry der news back. And for der lofe of Gott, do not use der radio! He will pick it up and we are geflooey!"

CHAPTER V.

FIGHTING BACK.

HINES sat at a telephone in Portland, and things began to move. He called Boston, and long, lean, greyhound-like ships with many funnels slipped their moorings and slid smoothly out to sea. Three cruisers raised steam and went after them. And there was vast activity in the Navy yard, and presently an old harbor-defense monitor went staggering gamely after the more modern ships.

He called New York, and trains were shunted swiftly here and there, and there were shouted orders and the rattling of accouterments and much profanity; then flatcars with squat, ungainly-wheeled shapes upon them rolled out of the city bound northward. They traveled at the speed of the fastest express trains, and passenger flyers were sidetracked to let them pass.

Hines called here and there, and everywhere there were swift and deadly preparations for action. At Newport, two battalions of Marines entrained with an astounding celerity. At other scattered cities other fighting men and fighting machines made ready. Three howitzer batteries were bumping at top speed over the rails to Maine. Two twelve-inch guns with railroad mountings formed a racing special train with cars of shells and their gun crews.

All the preparations were Hines's doing, and he explained his orders as he gave them in the manner of a man who does not expect to survive their carrying out. Metinic Island was no more than six miles from an accessible part of the mainland. Artillery will range that distance easily. Within two hours after Hines's return from the reconnoissance flight in which three bombing planes were lost, artillery officers had reached the future firing-point by plane and were marking out gun-emplacements and swearing at the inadequacy of the local maps.

Hines's plan was to mass artillery in such quantity and with such a supply of ammunition that Preston's headquarters could be smothered under a rain of explosives. One field gun to ten yards of target can keep that target under an adequate barrage fire. No man can live in the open under such a hail of death. But in addition there would be the warships. Four superdreadnaughts, three cruisers, and a monitor would pound the island. Three hours before dawn there would be over twenty guns of twelve and fourteen-inch caliber trained upon the island, and upward of thirty eight-inch rifles to assist.

Nothing should be able to live on the surface or beneath it, however deep the dugouts Preston might have prepared. Hines was grimly calculating that within three minutes of the opening of fire every square foot of earth upon the island should have been plowed up by explosives. And Kathryn was there. She must be.

It looked perfect, however, from the standpoint of destruction. The resources of one regional department of the Army would be at hand before dawn. The Navy would have its ships at hand with shotted guns. The air would be alive with flying craft. A signal; a blast of cannon-fire; a terrific, long-continued battering, and Metinic Island should disappear forever.

IT did look perfect. Too perfect, considering that Preston knew what to expect now. Schaaf paced nervously back and forth as Hines gave his orders.

"He has something up his sleefe, Hines," he said irritably. "He has taken plenty from der cuffs, but he has something more."

Hines relaxed deliberately, with an effort.

"What has he got?"

"He has four-centimeter wafes," said Schaaf desperately. "They explain nearly eferything. It was calculated a year and a half ago that der death-ray of der imaginatif nofelists is theoretically impossible. But if a man makes Hertzian wafes of four centimeters frequency, he has der world by der tail. All der armies haff been trying to make them, because it can be proofed by mathematics that in der path of a beam of four-centimeter wafes der air will be a conductor der same as metal. Breston has them. He has sent a beam of them straight up to der Heaviside Layer. And his short wafes that make der air opaque, they trafel along der four-centimeter beam until they hit der Layer. There they spread out. So much is simple. Der bomber that was destroyed when we went to look simply difed through a beam of four-centimeter wafes that was carrying four thousand kilowatts of Breston's prifate short short wafes up to der Heaviside Layer. It is no wonder it crashed!

"Der thing that destroyed der other bombers is just as simple. A beam of der same conducting wafes, with darkness in it so they could see to aim it, and high-frequency current shot into it at der critical moment. A plane in a beam of those four-centimeter wafes is just like a plane touching a power-transmission line. If der frequency is high enough, there is no need of a ground wire to electrocute efery man on board. Der whole plane starts sparking, it bursts into flame and der bombs explode. That is what he has used!"

"I wonder," said Hines drearily, "if he can use it on the artillery?"

Schaaf shrugged. He resumed his impatient pacing up and down the room.

"But he has something else up der sleefe. I know he has something else up der sleefe. It is too easy! Much too easy!"

The clocks announced seven o'clock. Eight. Nine o'clock. Reports began to come in. Artillery units had arrived, were digging in. A battery of field guns was ready to fire.

Nine thirty: Two guns of a howitzer section were ready to fire. One naval gun on a railroad mounting was in position.

Ten: All the howitzers were ready to fire. The cruisers were in position

and the battleships were coming up. Destroyers had ventured into the dense mass of darkness that hung about the island. The darkness was nearly a circle, six miles across. One of the destroyers came scuttling out with flames pouring from it. It reached the clear air and was aflame from end to end. It floated, a lurid torch, while its crew was taken off. It blew up and sank at eleven ten precisely.

At eleven thirty the basket-mast of a battle cruiser glowed red, halfway up its height, and its separate steel rods bent and buckled, and then cooled off again, leaving the fighting-top careened crazily over at right angles and far out over the ship's side.

"Breston is trying to fight," said Schaaf shortly. "He is swinging der beam of four-centimeter wafes around and shooting all der juice he can supply into it. It happened to hit der fighting-mast. The beam is infisible now. Since he cannot see what he is aiming at, he does not want anybody else to see der beam. It is infisible death, that beam."

HINES smiled queerly. He picked up a telephone and spoke almost softly into it.

"All ready for me? . . . Very well. It's understood that zero hour is 3 A.M. if the darkness is not cut before then. If it is cut, bolometer readings are to be taken and action judged by their indications. All ships and guns are to stand by in any event until the island is occupied. Very well. Good luck!"

He stood up and held out his hand to Schaaf.

"I'm going to the island, Schaaf. Good-by."

Schaaf scowled at him.

"Of all der double-barreled, triple-distilled idiots I efer saw," he said bitterly, "you are der worst! Hines, you are a *verdammt* fool! You are going to der island—"

Hines shrugged.

"It's a form of suicide," he said evenly. "I know it. But that devil has got Kathryn there. I've arranged for him to be blown off the earth. She'll be blown up with him. We were to have been married this morning. So I—well, I'm going to be there, too."

Schaaf swore explosively in guttural German.

"That is not what I am talking about!" he snapped. "That is lunacy, yes! But der magnificent imbecility is that you think I am going to let Breston's short-wafe outfit be blown to bits without getting a look at it! There is a place reserfed for me in der boat that is going to der island. Try and keep me out of it!"

Hines looked steadily at Schaaf for nearly half a minute. Then he smiled.

"You're a damned liar, Schaaf. You're going because—"

"Shut up!" snapped Schaaf again. He drew himself up to his full six feet and something of whiskered blondness. "Hines, I am a damned liar, yes! And you are a damned fool! So that makes two of us going out to be fery unpleasantly bumped off, and if you try to talk silly sentiment I will poke you in der eye. Come on!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE ISLAND OF DARKNESS.

A DESTROYER took the pair northward, flinging itself madly over the dark, dark sea. After the lights of Portland vanished behind them there was a period when the solid deck beneath seemed the only object in existence. There was no sky, no sun, no horizon. There was no land.

There was only an invisible bulk beneath them which quivered insanely, and a wind blowing from the oblivion before them to the oblivion behind. There was no up, no down. One grew giddy from the sheer absence of anything by which to orient oneself. The utter loneliness of the dark was terrifying, because not even the sea could be seen. Even in some imagined spaceship, isolated in empty space, there would be stars for comfort. Here there was only nothingness.

When a yellow light glowed far away and seemed like a star, it was actually a lamp in a farmhouse window overlooking the sea. And in that farmhouse the sense of isolation was so great as to induce hysteria. The folk in the farmhouse were experiencing exactly the sensations of people on a tiny fragment of earth set floating free in a cosmos containing nothing else—nothing! Not even other worlds unthinkably remote.

It was a loneliness, a desolation, that clutched at the throat. All through the world that same despair was descending. In the cities it was less appalling, but on ships that steamed over invisible seas, and in lighthouses that were always isolated and now became small hells, and in tiny mountain cabins, and small hamlets and places innumerable, the dread of the dark grew and grew.

Some people went insane, and many grew hysterical. It is a matter of record that folk went solemnly out of their villages and set the woods about them on fire so that the flames and firelit smoke would give them something to look at other than the awful blackness which lay over the world. It was a curious aftermath of the darkness that the use of illuminants at night was multiplied many times.

But on the destroyer these things were unknown. It swept on northward, horribly alone, until presently lights appeared to the left, and searchlights stabbed futilely upward, and there was a confused droning tumult over the land. The whole air force of the Army and Navy was being massed for action, together with the ships of a naval division and the artillery of an army corps.

Then the destroyer slackened speed, and went on into a bay where bonfires burned brightly, and its engines stopped and its anchor-chain clanged thunderously as it ran out. A thirty-foot cutter came alongside, moving by oars, and made fast to the landing-ladder of the destroyer. It waited.

"Efficiency," said Hines dryly. "No time lost, Schaaf. These men are volunteers for our forlorn hope. You know why I want to be on the island, but I'm able to have the zero hour held off only because the government wants to get hold of Preston's apparatus if it can. As a military weapon. We're going to try to take the island by storm."

"Der idea," observed Schaaf grimly, "is a lot of hooey."

Hines said nothing. He led the way down to the boat.

OARS dipped. The cutter pulled away. A navy launch swarmed up officiously and flung a line. Half a minute later the launch was speeding for the blackness of the open sea and the cutter went tearing through the water after it, squatted down astern until it seemed the waves should come in over the gunwale.

They could see little as the two boats moved, of course, but Hines stared up at the dark shore line. Guns were massed and massing there. Waiting

and ready along a four-mile front. At one single word a storm of steel would spring from the hungry muzzles. A hurtling, screaming hail of death would leap upward and forward through the darkness. Six miles away it would descend.

Four miles of guns, packed as closely together as they could be brought up by straining locomotives and racing, swearing men. Four miles of guns concentrating on a little more than one mile of target, with the heaviest guns of the fleet to blast away what little of the island the shore artillery left.

There was no wind save that made by the movement of the towing launch, but that was bitter. The men on the seats of the cutter huddled down into their greatcoats, taking it easy. A flash light signaled off to seaward.

"We're passing between some islands," said Hines evenly. "They'll cast off when we're well on our way. The oars are muffled. If we can land on the damned island secretly, so much the better."

Five minutes, and the launch on ahead was slowing up. The men in the cutter bestirred themselves. A man in the bow tossed the towline overboard. The oars stretched out again. The launch swept around and went purring softly back into the darkness

The cutter, without a word of command, began to move with the rhythmic pulsatory effect of a rowed boat toward the utter blackness of the open sea.

"Who's in command here?" demanded Hines.

"I am," said a voice. A flash light glowed through cupped fingers. A clean-shaved and rather anxious young ensign's face could be made out.

"Shoot der works," said Schaaf amiably. "What haff you done?"

"I've a pair of microphones overboard," explained the young officer nervously, "of the sort used for listening for submarines. They'll give us the line on two launches that are working submerged sounders for us. I can get the angles from both of them to make a course for the island even if we are blinded. And besides, we'll be able to hear the waves on the beach when we get near."

"Clefer," said Schaaf. "Fery good."

"And my men are all in linemen's boots and rubber. They're armed with—er—the regular mopping-up equipment."

"Which is?" said Schaaf encouragingly.

"Why — er — grenades, automatic pistols, and automatic shotguns throwing nine extra-sized buckshots to a shell. Also we've a couple of Lewis guns with us. We have twenty men."

"I can think of nothing you haff left out for a fine party but der beer," said Schaaf. "You haff done excellently, sir."

Oars rose and fell in a ghostlike silence. There was no splashing. Hines had ordered a boat propelled by oars because any motor-driven craft would be heard approaching the island. Hines had no hope of leaving that spot of land, but he did want to land on it alive. He fumbled for a cigar and lit it. The light of his match was the only glow of illumination in all the world.

They were far enough from shore and low enough in the water to make any possible light invisible. The sky was wholly black. The water was wholly black. Ahead and behind and to the right hand and the left there was no relief from the abysmal blackness anywhere.

Hines's cigar small as was its gleam, provided a literal illumination by which the farthest man in the bow of the boat saw the face of his seat-mate faintly pinkened.

"If that darkness—" began the ensign.

He stopped. He was watching Hines's cigar fascinatedly. It had been a dull-red coal, brightening to what seemed a vivid incandescence when Hines puffed on it. Now it seemed to have gone out, and revived very, very faintly at each puffing. A moment later it seemed no longer to exist.

"WE'RE in the darkness now," said Hines dryly.

His tone was entirely matter-of-fact, which was wise; for the men at the oars had been watching the glow of his cigar. It was the only spot of light in the universe. And when it went out, the effect was horrible.

"How do der microphones work?" asked Schaaf interestedly.

"I have the line," said the ensign unsteadily. "We're a shade under three miles from the island."

The boat went on silently. About the island Preston had brought darkness down to earth over a circular space some six miles across.

The cutter rose and fell, and rose and fell, and the three men in the stern felt the rhythmic pulling of the oars. Every man felt the opacity of the air weighing upon him, pressing upon him.

All the world had been dark enough anyhow, but to feel that by no possible device could a light be made to shine was queerly horrible. A man felt as if he were buried alive. He had an almost hysterical impulse to beat at the darkness with his hands, to thrust it away from him.

"I hear the surf on the beach in the headphones," said the ensign, a long time later.

"You should," said Schaaf placidly.

Hines then spoke shortly.

"We land and form a line. By the way, we want to land at the southernmost tip of the island. I know the lay of the land, roughly. We are to be entirely silent, passing signals by touching each other in the blackness. There are probably charged wires about the island. If we run into lines of wire, we will short-circuit them with gun-barrels to the earth, and then cut them. When Preston's instruments show a short-circuit, he will probably cut the darkness to see about it. We go ahead then. Mop up the island. There is one woman here. Be careful not to hurt her. But this is one time to fight hard! If we don't kill Preston, he'll kill us!"

The ensign said—steadily this time—"You men heard that. Those are your orders."

There was a little gurgling noise ahead, a washing, splashing sound. It ran a long distance in a straight line across the bow of the boat. The rudder squeaked, and the boat's course shifted until the sound was abeam. The oars worked monotonously. Presently the washing sound seemed to come to an end and to go away in the distance. The rudder squeaked again. They went on their former course once more.

"If you put your ear to the gunwale," said the ensign in a voice that was barely a whisper, "you'll hear a queer humming, sir. The hull picks up the sound from the water. I've been hearing it in the microphones for some time. It sounds like engines, sir."

"Dynamos," said Schaaf in as low a tone. "Der dynamos and der Diesel engines that make der juice."

"I'm heading in for the beach," whispered the ensign. "Easy, men! Get ready to beach her, up forward."

The word passed to the bow in murmurs. The washing of waves became louder and louder. The booming of small breakers on sand grew more distinct. Hines visualized the southern end of the island as he had seen it from the air and tried to guess at the spot from the fact that they were headed for a sandy beach. He nodded to himself.

The boat checked with a grating sound. There was the little lifting feel of men leaping out to ease it ashore.

"And now," said Schaaf grimly, "*Gott strafe* Breston!"

THEY disembarked as blind men, feeling the foaming small breakers beating utterly unseen about their rubber-booted legs. They fumbled at each other to form a skirmish-line. At a low word from Hines they moved on.

It was a slow, a stumbling, an infinitely cautious party of the blind. Every man's eyes were wide and staring, through sheer instinctive effort to catch some glimmer of the light that in nature is nowhere quite absent. But here, the very air was opaque.

The blackness was oppressive past conception. A man felt as if he were buried alive, as if the darkness pressed upon him, as if a shifting stuff pressed upon his breast and would presently stop his breathing.

A tiny clatter, off in the darkness. The line halted. A message passed along its length in a murmur.

"A wire about a foot off the ground. It isn't charged."

"Step over it and go on," ordered Hines. "At any alarm, fling yourselves flat on the ground and wait."

The line moved on again. Hines had cracked the crystal from a watch-compass and by the feel of its needle led the way. He, also, came upon that uncharged wire, stretched upon stakes no more than a foot above ground. It gave a little as he touched it. He passed over it.

Then, quite suddenly, a man screamed, down at the end of the line. A weapon went off thunderously in the blackness. One of the two Lewis guns roared itself empty. There was the clatter of men flinging themselves to the earth. Then silence.

Hines pressed his jaws tightly together. Instinctively he peered about, though his eyes could convey no possible sensation to his brain. There was only blackness and stillness.

Presently he became aware of the surf drumming away behind him. Then he heard the faintest possible humming noise overheard. At the same time a pungent odor stung his nostrils. He heard Schaaf exclaim softly, swearing under his breath.

Some one came writhing along the ground, counting the prone figures he passed.

"Inspector Hines!"

The faint humming noise passed toward the right. It died away.

"Here," said Hines quietly.

The ensign's voice panted.

"We've lost three men. Stone dead. Electrocuted."

Schaaf's voice came from astonishingly near by.

"Der four-centimeter beam," he said grimly. "They heard us. Perhaps der low wires were burglar-alarms. Breston passed der beam of four-centimeter wafes all about, with der high-tension current in it. Those three men were struck by it. It was like being struck by a life wire with

ten thousand volts in it. I smelled ozone just now. My nose stings yet with it. Der beam passed humming ofer our heads."

The ensign asked nervously: "What do we do now, sir?"

"Lie still," said Hines coldly. "They'll get curious presently."

The ensign crawled away. Darkness. Blackness. The sound of the surf behind them. Time seemed endless, waiting. One had a ghastly feeling that it had been an hour or more, two hours—that it was time for the massed guns, six miles away, to open fire. One's ears strained for the whistling sound of that first flight of projectiles from four miles of guns.

Gradually an infinitely faint rumbling noise made itself felt. It was felt as much as heard. The sound came through the earth. The dynamos and the monstrous generators in Preston's underground dugouts, making the power that had darkened the world.

WITHOUT a trace of flickering, the darkness broke. With startling clarity the line of prone men could see. An unbearable glare smote upon their eyes, but despite it they saw.

The darkness had vanished from before their eyes. They seemed to be in a monstrous cavern whose walls were angular masses of jetty black. A great magnesium flare was burning on the ground. It lighted up three clumsy concrete structures three-quarters sunk in the ground. There were men standing near those structures. Three of them stood by a bowl-shaped thing of wires. They were looking—all the men were looking—at the line of prone riflemen. The darkness seemed to have been lifted for the precise purpose of permitting Preston's aids to look.

From half a dozen tripods some six feet or so across darkness poured out in wide, fanlike beams. Those beams united overhead to form a roof of darkness, seemingly supported by the inverted pyramids of black. They united to shut off the rest of the world. They blended almost at the edge of the surf to cut off all vision upon the water. Hines and Schaaf and the volunteers gazed for exactly three seconds the length of a colossal cavern in which lights could glow, but which was roofed and walled with opacity.

Three seconds; while a man could breathe in and out and in again. Then from all along the line of prone men gunfire flashed at the exact instant that darkness fell upon them again. The remaining Lewis gun blared into nothingness, emptying its drum of cartridges. The automatic shotguns bellowed their magazines empty.

Somewhere off in the darkness a man shrieked, and there were shoutings, and then a deadly, snarling voice cried out. Something was roaring horribly, off there in the new-fallen blackness. A spark was leaping a colossal gap with the tearing thunderous rasp that only a current up in the thousands of volts will make.

"Scatter!" snapped Hines. "They've sighted that beam on us!"

He leaped to his feet and bolted—ahead. Some one pounded along beside him, though the presence of the other man was felt rather than heard, and of course nothing at all could be seen. Up ahead the sparking sound cut off sharply, leaving Hines's ears ringing with the sudden silence.

It seemed as if some wire—perhaps the high-tension wire to the four-centimeter beam—had been cut by a bullet, and now a switch was thrown. Through the ringing in his ears Hines heard the

snarling voice ahead of him shout an order. He blundered on and tripped over something. The smell of scorched rubber rose from his boots.

He struck savagely at the thing with his gun-barrel, and somehow the darkness about him seemed to change. It was probably a beam darkness-transmitter, which he had smashed. But in an intangible cavern whose walls were opacity there was no great difference.

He went racing on, straining his yet-ringing ears for sounds, and crashed headlong into concrete. He gave a cry of satisfaction and began to fumble his way feverishly along its length. The man who had run beside him, panting, grunted with satisfaction as he in turn felt the concrete.

It was Schaaf. He mumbled to himself and Hines caught, "*verdammt,*" and "*Schrecklichkeit*" and other much less repeatable words.

A door! Hines fumbled at his belt and found one single grenade.

"A steel door, Schaaf!" he panted. "I'm setting off a grenade before it. Get back around the corner!"

He deposited the little globe of iron, jerked out the pin, and fled.

The earth shook and a blast of sound which was like a blow on the chest smote them—for all that they were around the corner of the concrete. Then Hines flung himself forward again, rasping his fingers on the rough concrete and choking on the fumes of the explosive.

The door was blown away, blasted from its frame. No glimmer of illumination came through the awful darkness that was everywhere, but Hines stepped boldly through the opening with his automatic shotgun held ready for the instant light should reach him.

The curious feeling of a metal floor under his foot. Then emptiness!

He went hurtling downward, falling into bright and blinding light. He struck something with his shoulder in the act of falling, and it wrenched his muscles cruelly but partly broke the drop. He wound up with a crash on concrete, all of fifteen feet down, and lay still for an instant, dazed.

HE had a vague impression of a room that was sunk deep in the ground. There were masses of glittering glass, and many lights, and a humming noise filled all the air with a monotonous drone. Hines realized indistinctly that the curious squat structures on the island were merely the roofs of dugouts, dug down to safety below the surface of the earth. Then he heard a peculiar tearing, spitting sound near by.

His eyes focused dazedly on his shotgun, lying on the floor a little distance off. It was smoking strangely. Sparks were darting from it into the stone floor. It began abruptly to glow a dull red. Suddenly it exploded luridly. Every shell in its magazine went off in a single blast which was not disastrous solely because the red hot metal offered so little resistance to the expanding gases. They tore it apart almost like so much dough.

Somebody or other was racing down the steel steps Hines had tumbled from. Huge hands swept Hines from the floor. He smelled burning rubber. He knew that it was Schaaf who tore his automatic pistol out of his belt and flung it away. He knew, also, that it was Schaaf who leaped with him to one side of the room. He had a dizzy impression of glowing tubes of glass all about him.

Then a snarling, arrogant voice said in insolent satisfaction:

"Police Inspector Hines, I believe,

and my former assistant, Professor Schaaf. Very well met! I've wanted to have you two men killed for a long time."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN WHO MURDERED LIGHT.

HINES'S automatic pistol tore itself to pieces as the shells in its butt went off all at once. Its fragments on the concrete floor glowed dully red, then slowly cooled off when they ceased to emit sparks.

Hines staggered to his feet and found himself penned in behind a monster bank of vacuum tubes which glowed redly. The glass of the tubes was inordinately thick. These tubes would not break by concussion, nor by however determined a blow of a man's fist—Preston had learned, from his debacle in the Storm.

Hines was conscious of them, and of things below them which might have been gigantic transformers of the type used in radio. But as his brain cleared from the crack on the concrete floor, his whole attention was taken up by the facts which it was immediately necessary for him to face.

Schaaf was beside him, crouching a little to have his whole body behind the banks of vacuum tubes. Schaaf was snarling a little, and his blue eyes were glinting fire. He seemed to be unarmed as well as Hines, and he was gazing across the deep-sunk room with an expression of concentrated malevolence.

Preston was there, the man Hines had seen exactly once, and for half a minute only, but whom he had been hunting for months. He was standing by a small platform which itself was next to a wide door through which the humming noise came. Preston's hand was on a small thing which looked rather like a searchlight, except that instead of a mirror for a reflector it had a sort of grid of glistening wires. There were two switches on its top.

Preston was small and dapper, and wore a neat Vandyke beard trimmed to an accurate point. He looked like a highly civilized man, even alongside the nattily attired pair of followers who lounged always within feet of him.

They were gangsters, those two, from impeccably tailored clothing to impossibly expensive haberdashery in vivid color.

Preston seemed precisely the pattern of the professional man—until one noticed his eyes. They were blank and hard and triumphant, precisely the eyes of a madman with paranoiac delusions of grandeur. They were insolent and scornful and very, very arrogant eyes. They were the eyes of a man who has persuaded himself that he is invested with supreme authority, and who derides and despises the mere worms of humans within his gaze. Unfortunately, Preston's ideas of his own powers were not delusions. They were facts.

He smiled at them, and his smile was filled with the same vanity-inspired scorn.

"I assure you, Schaaf," he said in a metallic voice that made one long to kick him, "I assure you that your being alive now is due to my forbearance."

Schaaf spoke, his voice purring with rage. He spoke in German, and the words crackled. At the end he added wrathfully:

"And if you don't understand der names I called you, you are a lot of banana oil!"

He turned to Hines, growling, and

Hines knew somehow that Schaaf was inspecting the contrivances, the elaborate hook-ups, the involved array of apparatus with a desperately concentrated attention, working frantically to understand their operation.

Hines's head was clearing swiftly, and he looked about, and went sick with a helpless rage at the same time that his pulses pumped with fury. He looked at Preston with eyes like flames. Preston had had Kathryn kidnaped. Preston had—

"You saw what happened to your weapons," said Preston, smiling unpleasantly. "I'm letting you live because it amuses me to watch you. I have—" he looked at a wrist watch—"I have more than half an hour before Inspector Hines's artillery blows this island out of the water. And I am inclined to let you two beg your lives. I won't give them to you, but I'll listen."

"Beg, der deffil!" snapped Schaaf. "Breston, you are der most complete idiot in der history of der human race! With der brains I reluctantly admit you possess, you could haff been a benefactor of mankind! And now we haff to kill you!—Where is Miss Bush?"

Preston threw back his head to laugh. His two guards regarded the two men behind the vacuum tubes with a wary, indifferent alertness. They were killers, hired to do murder to order. They regarded Schaaf and Hines as the professional killer always does regard his prospective victims.

"She's here," said Preston sardonically. "She's here! Quite a pretty girl, too. And safe—so far!"

Hines's teeth ground together. Face to face with Preston, a consummation for which he had hoped and worked for months. And helpless. Preston had destroyed his weapons with that little searchlight-like thing.

"It is lucky for you that she is safe," snapped Schaaf. "Breston, you *verdammt* fool, do you realize that you are licked before you start?"

SWEAT was standing out on Schaaf's face. He stood tense in every muscle, and Hines had a queer impression that Schaaf was all brain, that every particle of him was racing madly to absorb the meaning of the wires, the tubes, the switches, the connections in this diabolical control room. He seemed to feel Schaaf working desperately to piece together the meaning of every appliance and how it worked.

"Licked?" Preston laughed, the mirthless, scornful laugh of the paranoiac. "You are living by my pleasure, because it amuses me to watch—"

"That is true to a certain extent only," said Schaaf. He spoke with a measured calmness in which only Hines could detect the false note. "I tell you why. I haff solfed your apparatus! Before I left der mainland to come here, I had explained to my assistants der entire method of all your defices. I tell you you are licked, and I proof it. Der darkness wafes I have made myself. And moreofer, I haff made der four-centimeter wafes that make der air conducting and enable you to throw a beam of radiation that is like a life wire charged with electricity, wherefer you will. And der people on der mainland haff der apparatus too!"

Hines's eyes flickered. Schaaf was bluffing. It was a monumental sort of bluff, and the one thing that might work—if Schaaf could carry it out. Schaaf was bluffing for both their lives, now, and Kathryn's to boot.

"I tell you how you and I make der

four-centimeter wafes," said Schaaf, grimly. "Der vacuum tube as at present designed cannot possibly go below a quarter of a meter, and then der wafe is not a pure sine wafe. I know! But you haff four-centimeter wafes, and smaller. Yes! And der word of how you do them is going all ofer der cifilized world right now. Because you can take six tubes, each one emitting wafes of one-fourth meter length, and so adjust them that der separate wafes of der separate tubes come four centimeters after each other, gifing you a beam of der death rays. *Hein?*"

He grinned savagely at Preston, though sweat stood out on his forehead. And Preston snarled.

"You can carry der process farther," said Schaaf in a judicial tone. Hines, listening, marveled at the assurance with which Schaaf was stating, as definite facts, his hurried deductions from the apparatus about them. "By der use of a sufficient number of tubes, you can make wafes of any length you choose, merely by der superimposition of one wafe-outline upon another. Der United States Gofernment is now turning out this apparatus in quantity!"

He waved his hands about the room. "Der darkness wafes are made in that way. Der conducting beam is made in that way. Eferything you haff is made in that way. And we haff eferything you haff efer thought of, with ten times der power you haff, and a hundred times der brains! You are licked, Breston! Hines and I, we came to this island because you are der damnedest scoundrel in forty nations. You haff Miss Bush here. Giff her back and we giff you half an hour's start. No more! You are licked! We make der bargain! Turn ofer Miss Bush, unharmed. Turn off der darkness. We giff you half an hour to escape in. That is efery damned thing we will giff you. And then we come after you, and I, personally, choke you by der neck until I kill you!"

PRESTON was livid. Hines's pulse leaped in savage satisfaction. Schaaf had worked out the whole thing from sight of Preston's outfit. His bluff was working. Preston did believe the whole world was equipped to fight him with his own weapons.

But his madman's eyes flamed with the crazy rage of shattered vanity.

"Everything I've got?" he snarled. "This too? Tell me how this is done!"

He flung a switch on the top of the tiny projector. There was a sudden vivid glow at a table against the wall some fifteen feet from Hines. A long, serried ray of tubes leaped into light. Utter silence fell.

"Look at that metal!" raged Preston. "Look at it!"

He pointed a shaking hand at the fragments of Hines's two weapons on the concrete floor. And they turned suddenly white—snow white. Then they became wet. A liquid trickled from them and dripped to the concrete, where it bubbled furiously and formed a thick white mist that spread out over the floor. Preston flung back his switch and as the bank of tubes went out, he laughed in shrill, insolent, vanity mad triumph—because Schaaf's cheeks had become drained of every particle of blood.

"That's what I'm going to use on Hines's artillery!" boasted Preston hysterically. "This little projector is all I need! All!"

Schaaf clenched his hands more tightly still.

"*Gott!*" he muttered thickly. "*Gott!*"

"You didn't work out that one, eh?" demanded Preston arrogantly. "Now

I'll tell you: that's the same thing as all the rest! Fluorescence! Causing one type of energy to be changed to another! Under my four-centimeter waves, the air becomes fluorescent. But these waves work on iron!

"Where these waves strike, the surface of the iron becomes fluorescent. It absorbs heat from the air and from its own interior! It turns heat to short radio waves, and every particle of iron in the beam of these waves, no matter how far away it is, radiates away every particle of energy it possesses! It sinks to absolute zero! Four hundred and sixty-two degrees below zero Fahrenheit!

"You saw air liquefy in contact with the iron that was red hot a moment ago. What's going to happen to the men on your battleships when every particle of iron or steel drops to the temperature of liquid air? What's going to happen to your guns when they're down to the temperature of liquid helium and the gun crews try to fire them? They'll fly to bits like brittle ice! Licked, am I? I'll wipe out your damned artillery with half a kilowatt in this projector! I'll sink your battleships with their crews frozen solid.

"I'll play that beam on New York and every particle of steel in the city will be brittle as ashes! I'll bring down every damned skyscraper in the town. I'll teach them a lesson they won't forget. Make my apparatus and try to work it against me? I'll—"

He was working himself into frothing rage. He was shouting. He was bellowing. His voice was a strident scream of rage, the rage of the man who has convinced himself that he is the most intelligent of all living men and then finds the distinction threatened.

"You fools!" Preston gasped. "Trying to fight *me!* Like savages with clubs going against a battleship! I'll show you! I'll show—"

Schaaf had bluffed, working out what Preston had done, after a swift survey of the apparatus about him. He'd seen Preston's transmitters and had raced his brain to the manner of their operation. He'd tried to bluff that all the world knew now how Preston had kept it sunk in night. But he hadn't known this one last trick, which was the most deadly of all. And Schaaf muttered thickly to himself with his eyes sunken in and dull. Because this last weapon was invincible.

THEN Hines looked sharply upward and snapped, "All right, men! Everybody in here!"

He gained two seconds only; two seconds in which Preston was looking upward, and his guards with him, toward the door into which Hines himself had stumbled. But that two seconds was enough. Before they could look down, Hines had leaped, dragging from their sockets two of the thick tubes to use as missiles.

The first one struck Preston and flung him against the projector. Hines was within a yard of Preston when he heard Schaaf cry out. But it was too late to stop then. He sank his fingers in Preston's throat as one of the guards screamed.

The projector of the freezing beam had been whirled around. A guard had felt his arm frozen to the elbow as he tried to raise his weapon. He screamed, and screamed, and Schaaf went into action frantically, flinging the huge vacuum tubes about and crashing them until the second guard was helpless and the freezing beam was off.

But Hines paid no attention. He forgot that he should be getting a

bullet in the back of his head at any instant. Preston was squirming under him, getting at something in his pocket. There was a sickeningly muffled explosion in the middle of the battling pair of men. Another.

Preston seemed literally to go mad. Frothing at the mouth, he tried to sink his teeth in Hines. He fought crazily, insanely, with maniacal strength. Hines forgot that there was anything in the world but this one single man he hated. He forgot everything—

And then Schaaf was pulling him to his feet, crying:

"We haff fife minutes, Hines! Fife minutes only! Find Miss Bush!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ZERO HOUR.

THE two of them came above ground with Kathryn, and only two minutes to spare. The ensign and ten men were about to assail a squat concrete structure after the orthodox fashion of warfare when Hines gasped, "Get your men! Get 'em to the boat! We killed Preston but not his men! Zero hour's two minutes off!"

The air upon the island itself was no longer opaque. Schaaf's berserk rage among the vacuum tubes had cut that off. But the column of darkness leading to an utterly black sky still held steady. Somewhere in the extraordinarily clear air a rocket shot up, very far away.

The ensign's whistle shrilled madly. Hines, Schaaf, Kathryn, and a dozen men raced for the boat. Other men loomed up, panting, and flung themselves through the night. Once a man tripped over a low wire and four men fell on top of him. There was a long drawn out, deliberate whining sound in the air. It was growing louder. It rose to a shriek and passed overhead and went off deafeningly a quarter of a mile away. The four fallen men were up in the fractional part of a split second at that sound.

Into the boat in desperate, panting haste. Shoving off.

They had been rowing a pitifully short time when little licking flames became visible on the skyline toward shore. Somewhere in the upper darkness there was a hail of steel and high explosive hurtling toward the island.

Something shrieked and splashed overboard not a dozen yards away. The drumming noise of a barrage began, and held for nearly a second, and then the sound of exploding shells was not like a barrage at all. It was like one long, continuous explosion, punctuated with monstrous blasts of sound which could be nothing less than twelve inch shells exploding.

The men at the oars pulled like madmen. The air was full of the shrieking of steel missiles, and the island behind them was lost in a mass of darting flames like marsh fire. Things fell into the sea on all sides with monstrous splashings, and the cutter pitched crazily, and more shells screamed and whistled and howled, and lambent flames of death and destruction played over the island, with ever and again a blinding flash and an overpowering concussion where a big projectile had hit.

It seemed to Hines, holding fast to Kathryn, that they would be battered to pieces by sheer waves of sound if stray shells did not do the work. For that was a more immediate danger still. Many shells that fell short of the island ricocheted and exploded in mid-air, or splashed into the sea again on the farther side. Some fell fearfully near

them. Some struck in the shallows near the shore, and those explosions sent concussions through the water that made the hull of the speeding cutter quiver and shake. They racked and twisted the little cockleshell. The monstrous waves generated by the explosions flung it crazily about, and the concussions wrenched its timbers, and the blasts of the detonating shells half-dazed those in it.

But the oarsmen pulled like madmen. The ensign shouted encouragement and orders. And slowly—so slowly—the cutter drew away from the inferno that was the island.

HINES was holding Kathryn fiercely tight when he realized that Schaaf was shouting in his ear. They were a mile away from the island, but the din was still deafening.

"Hines!" bellowed Schaaf. "Hines! *Die Sterne!* Der stars are shining!"

The wind over the water was bitter cold, but as the cutter drew farther and ever farther away from the low-lying place that had been Preston's stronghold, all the world seemed to take on a nearly normal seeming.

Stars twinkled and glittered in the sky overhead. Far to the east a vast, partly round orb was coming up over the edge of the world. For the world had an edge again! It was the moon. And there were dusky little shadows against the stars, which would be clouds, and generally the world seemed astoundingly normal.

Later on, of course, the sun would rise, and there would be great winds rushing to meet its warm rays, and men and women and children would go mad with joy at sight of the orb they had missed for exactly one day.

Schaaf, swearing joyful Teutonic profanity, would plunge into a new task before him, of research and duplication of Preston's results, and would come out of it bleary-eyed from lack of sleep, but with apparatus which would perform every one of Preston's tricks to order.

He would hale Hines back from his honeymoon to join with him in forming the International Weather Control Corporation, whose typhoon patrol vessels are to be found wherever bad weather threatens in the tropics, using Preston's discoveries to create half a dozen small counter-storms where a hurricane or typhoon threatens. Those same tiny storms, too, he and Hines would use to lengthen the Alaskan summer by two months and raise the winter temperature by nearly thirty degrees.

All this was yet to happen, and the possibly greater benefit of liberating an unlimited supply of power by Preston's freezing ray. Liquid air drips from every iron surface on which those rays are playing. Nowadays, that liquid air provides the power to run the monster generating stations at Manhasset, and Panama, and at Algiers. And since their success, others are being built as rapidly as the structures can be completed. It seems probable that within a relatively few years coal need no longer be mined for power, nor need nations bicker or quarrel over petroleum.

But on that morning when the ship's cutter rowed away from Metinic Island, the coast toward which it moved was flickering oddly as if heat lightning were playing there. There were lurid spoutings of fire and shattering explosions coming from the land they had left, and there were dim bulks all around the horizon which emitted tongues of flame and unbearable thunderings. Even overhead there was noise.

It was a constant, long-continued screaming of things soaring through the air to fall upon and shatter further the already devastated earth of the island. The battleships and cruisers were literally destroying that small bit of Earth. Where the fourteen inch shells exploded there was only empty space left, into which the salt water seeped slowly.

The cutter went on, snail-like, while destruction raged behind it Schaaf fingered his beard and made blissful explanations to the ensign, to whom his blending of abstruse technicalities and incongruous slang was nearly unintelligible. Hines relaxed slowly from his tension. He knew that Preston was dead now. He was sure of it at last. Quite, quite sure—he clenched his strong hands.

Kathryn said uneasily:

"I—I've a great story for the *Star*."

"Forget it," said Hines briefly. "We were supposed to be married yesterday, Kathryn."

"Y-yes," she admitted. "We were."

"So," said Hines, "we are going to be married to-day."

He held her hand fast.

"Y-yes," she said, after a long time. "We are. . . But oh, when I think what might have happened, I wish I'd never heard of Preston. I wish he never had existed."

"Shush, my dear," said Schaaf paternally. "He got you a husband. Der statement is banana oil."

THE END.

The American Pyramid

THAT posterity ten thousand or one million years in the future may know how we lived and why we, as a civilization, died, a gigantic steel-reenforced cement pyramid is being built at Monte Ne, a remote village in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. When completed, probably in 1932, it will have three timeproof chambers in which will be sealed records outlining our civilization, its rise and growth, dangers threatening its overthrow and a symposium of current opinions why it will decay.

All preliminary work on this unusual project, including a cement base sixty feet square, which in turn rests on a solid rock foundation known to extend more than eleven hundred feet into the earth, and a terrace or foyer that will seat more than one thousand people, is already completed.

The pyramid itself, resting on its sixty-foot base, is to begin forty feet square and ten feet high, reducing to thirty-two feet square with a height of thirty-five feet; then with a base twenty-two feet square it is to rise as a tapering shaft eighty-five feet, ending at the top six feet square. Allowing for possible erosion and the leveling of the mountains round about in the centuries to come, the top of the one hundred and thirty-foot pyramid should remain visible for the ages. In three chambers will be sealed scientifically prepared books and records that will outline our present civilization, as well as many objects used by us in our daily lives, from a needle to a radio.

The builder, William Hope Harvey, is seventy-nine years old. Mr. Harvey is a keen student, one-time lawyer and writer; he wants and expects nothing for himself from this odd venture. *H. R. Pace.*

"Think of that letter!" the Swami commanded the bound man

The Radio Menace

Trailing a kidnaped Federal official, reporter Larry Larrabee finds himself pitted against amazing adversaries with strange scientific weapons and stranger, non-human allies

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Gun Runners," "The Radio Flyers," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FANTASTIC and little believed reports of a pterodactyl flying through the twilight are amazingly borne out when Lawrence Larrabee, reporter on the Boston *Post*, actually sees it just before the assistant district attorney, Eliot Endicott, is kidnaped from his lofty office.

Endicott had been running down an amazingly clever crowd of criminals, and his findings were noted in a little red notebook in the office. When the district attorney and detectives were investigating his disappearance, pigeons flew in and carried off the notebook, dropping it to a man in the street below almost as if they possessed human intelligence.

Larry, following a clew that led into New Hampshire, shakes off a shadow who has been reporting on his movements to "Washington Jones, Intervale, N. H." Hurrying to Intervale, he looks over the pretty Helyn Kent's shoulder to read a letter from the missing Endicott!

This story began in the Argosy for June 7.

Endicott had written her during a few moments when he was unguarded, telling that the pterodactyl was real, and had flown him to another office building. After he had posted the letter, Endicott's abductor, Aaron Cohen, a likable but too ambitious young man who had been a college classmate, takes him to the radio laboratory. There the pterodactyl, whom Cohen and his robot-like, unhuman assistants call the King, is transmitted in the form of wireless energy to their New Hampshire headquarters, followed by Endicott himself, and later Cohen. The machine will transmit anything but metal.

Endicott boasts that he has posted a letter about his abduction; and Cohen has him rushed to a near-by laboratory.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INVADERS.

A FEW minutes later Cohen entered, accompanied by a black-bearded, dark-skinned, turbaned individual with piercing dark eyes.

"Swami Singh," commanded Cohen hurriedly, "get in touch with this man's thoughts instantly. A letter. A letter to a girl, written last night, and now in the mails. I must see it."

Without haste, and yet with steady rapidity, the Hindu pushed a table up to a position beside Endicott's chair, and placed a large crystal globe upon it. Then another table, bearing a complicated arrangement of lenses and electric apparatus, was wheeled up alongside the first table.

Cohen meanwhile brought up a third table, with other machinery, and plugged in cords connected with both. A silver screen was unrolled on the wall before the prisoner, and the room was darkened. A square of light showed on the silver screen.

The Hindu placed one hand on Endicott's forehead, and the other on the crystal globe; and boomed out, "Think of the beautiful girl and of the letter which you wrote her."

Involuntarily the bound man's thoughts flashed to his cousin Helyn, to the letter which he had surreptitiously written in captivity the night before, and to the mail chute in which he had dropped it. Only too late did he realize that it was imperative that he wipe all these thoughts from his mind. Instantly he concentrated on repeating the multiplication table. But it was too late.

"This young man has a strong will," reported Rajindra Singh. "He has shut off his thoughts as with a switch. But not until we were completely *en rapport* with respect to that letter. Observe."

And he nodded toward the screen. Eliot Endicott looked, and was startled to see the features of his cousin Helyn materialize upon it. Forgotten was the multiplication table. Back flashed his thoughts to the letter which he had written her, and suddenly there upon the screen was the letter, going down the chute. The *swami* made an adjustment, and the letter reappeared, jammed together with a lot of others, evidently inside a bag.

"You see," came the voice of Aaron Cohen, "what can be accomplished by combining the ancient wisdom of India with modern science. Observe the linking of a crystal globe, the telepathic powers of a Hindu *swami*, and a stereopticon projector. And now—did you ever see a telautograph, one of those machines that transmit handwriting by electricity? They have them

in banks, for train announcers, and for floor to floor communication in hotels. You must have seen them."

Endicott nodded miserably. He felt completely in their power. Why, oh why had he been so foolish as to mention the letter?

As Cohen was speaking, the scene on the silver screen shifted to a long sheet-iron table. The mail bag was dumped out, and there, face up, separate from the others, lay a stamped envelope addressed to "Miss Helyn Kent, Charlesgate Apartments, Cambridge, Massachusetts."

"Now, Eliot, watch the telepathograph, the triumph of modern occult science," announced Cohen.

So saying, he picked up the stylus of his apparatus and made several horizontal scratches with it.

"Now look at the screen," said he.

Endicott looked. The words "Charlesgate Apartments, Cambridge, Massachusetts," on the letter had been neatly ruled out.

Cohen then wrote something rapidly with his stylus; and as he wrote, Endicott was horrified to see the words "Jones Lumber Camp, Bartlett, New Hampshire," appear, as though by magic, on the letter upon the screen.

Just as the address changing was completed, a uniformed postal employee appeared on the scene, and began sorting out the mail on the sheet-metal table. Rajindra Singh swiftly switched off the projection apparatus, and pulled up the window shades.

"The letter will now come to us," asserted Cohen. "Your girl will never give it to the authorities, or even know what has become of you. We thank you for boasting about the letter. It is your *third* tactical mistake."

"You devil!" exclaimed the prisoner, straining at his bonds.

But Aaron Cohen only smiled tolerantly down at him.

Endicott's face would have borne the smile, and Cohen's the consternation, if they could only both have realized that this remarkable combination of crystal gazing and stereopticon projection was only speeding the fatal letter all the more rapidly to Helyn Kent, its original addressee.

AFTER Eliot's rage subsided he was untied.

"I really like to have you try to pit your powers against us," remarked his sinister classmate. "You are almost too clever for us. It gives me quite a thrill to oppose you. But you are so very, very indiscreet. Four serious slips have you made thus far. First, you bolted your office door on the inside. Secondly, you forgot that rattlesnakes hunt in pairs. Thirdly, you boasted about the letter. And fourthly, you mentioned that you had sent it to your girl."

"I only said 'a' girl!" interrupted Endicott.

"All right, a girl, then," continued Cohen. "Well, anyway, you made the four slips, and but for all of them you might have won over us. I want you to practice a little more discretion, for you are destined to fill an important position in our organization."

"Oh, cut it out, Aaron," remonstrated the exasperated Endicott. "I'm not going to join you, no matter what you offer."

"We'll see," replied Cohen enigmatically. "I am beginning to think of a rather good plan to make you want to join us."

Then the captive was sent back under guard to his room in the hospital. Lunch was served him there. After lunch magazines were brought him.

Also writing materials, with a brief note:

> I thought you might wish to write some more letters.
>
> AARON COHEN.

He tore up the note indignantly; what was the use of writing a letter here? The magazines afforded him but little amusement, for he spent most of his time worrying over his predicament. And finally a new worry came and quite blotted out all others, for it suddenly occurred to him that Helyn was no longer safe, now that his captors knew her identity and her Cambridge address.

After supper Cohen called briefly. He brought the morning papers, with the mention of Endicott's disappearance marked with blue pencil.

It was a blow to the assistant district attorney's pride to see how little attention had been paid to this, until Cohen pointed out what would have occurred to Endicott in a moment: "The authorities have evidently suppressed the stories. They probably have a clew. We must step warily from now on."

This seemed logical to Endicott also, but Cohen threw a new chill over him by continuing, "It may interest you to know that we have secured your report. Stole it right out from under the very nose of the district attorney, after he had taken it from the safe behind your bookcases. A newspaper reporter named Larrabee is on your trail, but we have him shadowed. If anything more turns up, I'll let you know. Good evening."

So the criminal organization had won all along the line! Endicott fell asleep that night worrying for the safety of Helyn.

The next morning after breakfast he was summoned to the administration building again.

After a short wait he was escorted into the office of Aaron Cohen, who announced, "I have a special honor for you. You are to be presented at court."

Thereupon he was conducted into the most pretentious room which he had yet seen in this woodland camp. The rough slab walls were completely covered with gorgeous oriental tapestries, and the floor with expensive Persian rugs. On a raised dais, at the end farthest from the entrance, squatted the huge slate-gray pterodactyl, which Endicott had seen before. But on each side of it was a strange new creature.

On its right stood a jet black ant, the size of a horse. Yet, except for its size, it was identically like the little black ants with which the people of this earth are familiar. On the top of its head, held there by straps, was a microphone similar to those used in broadcasting studios. Beside the microphone was a radio loud-speaker. Both were wired to the ant's antennæ and to certain other apparatus carried by a belt about the creature's thorax.

On the left of the gray flying dragon was a scarlet throne, on which sat a gorgeously beautiful woman, gowned in a form-fitting robe of royal blue velvet. And such a form! Never had Eliot Endicott seen such a perfect, such a ravishing feminine figure. On her golden hair was perched a gold crown set with sapphires.

Her face and arms were golden, too, rather than the to-be-expected pink; and, as Endicott studied them more closely, he saw that this was due to a thick short yellow fur which covered her entire skin. Yet so perfect were her features that their furry covering would have gone wholly unnoticed but for its golden color. Set in the golden

face were eyes of a blue so deep that they nearly matched her dress and the sapphires of her crown.

"Your majesties," announced Cohen, bowing low and deferentially, "may I present Eliot Endicott, Esq., Assistant United States District Attorney, of Boston, Massachusetts?"

Endicott bowed politely, with his eyes glued to the face of the queen.

His first thought had been, "What a strange triumvirate!" But this was quickly superseded by a fascination for the golden one.

And then she spoke, in a tinkling silver voice, like the noise of the wood thrush of those same New Hampshire mountains, a note so exquisitely beautiful that it almost causes pain.

The enthrallment of Eliot Endicott grew as he listened to that siren voice.

"We are honored," she said. "So you are to join our band, Mr. Endicott? We welcome you."

He was too enchanted to refuse.

"We can use your training," boomed from the loud-speaker of the ant, in guttural tones.

The gray pterodactyl said nothing, but merely stared at the young man with unblinking eyes.

ENDICOTT was led from the room.

"Who are they?" he demanded as soon as he was outside.

"I rather thought you would be interested," Cohen replied. "The dragon is Boomalayla, King of Yat. The antman is Doggo, formerly a Formian of Cupia, but now of Yat as well. The lady is Quivven the Goldenflame, a Princess of Vairkingia."

"And what the deuce are Yat, and Cupia, and Vairkingia? I have never heard of them."

Cohen laughed.

"You wouldn't be expected to," he replied. "Those are all countries of the planet Venus. The King, Boomalayla, longed for new worlds to conquer, but being hemmed in by powerful enemies on the two continents each side of Yat, he picked up the Earth as being a simpler proposition. So he and Doggo and Quivven came down here."

"But how could they get here from Venus — assuming that you aren't stringing me?" asked Endicott.

"They knew the secret of the wireless transmission of matter. I helped on this end, having first had the good fortune to get in touch with them by a special long-distance radio of my own design. In fact, the enterprise of their conquest of the Earth was largely my idea. As a reward for my assistance, I stand first in power beneath the Great Three. A sort of prime minister."

"It sounds to me," the other commented, "for all the world like the ravings of an opium-dream; and yet those creatures are not known on Earth; it may well be true. The evidence certainly points that way."

"You remind me," laughed Cohen, "of the hayseed who gazed for a long time at a giraffe in a circus, and then sadly shook his head and remarked, 'There ain't no sech animile.'"

Endicott was then returned to his quarters, and was left with his magazines again.

CHAPTER V.

TO DISPOSE OF A CLEW.

AARON COHEN in person visited the post office at Bartlett that morning to get the mail, but the redirected letter from Eliot Endicott to Helyn Kent hadn't yet arrived. He

came again in person for the afternoon mail, but still the coveted letter was not among those in his box. So he made bold to inquire of the postmaster.

"You haven't seen a letter addressed to Miss Helyn Kent, Jones Lumber Camp, have you?"

"Sure I have," replied the official. "But I thought the address was a mistake, though, so I give it to Miss Kent herself. She was in here just a minute ago."

"Well, you pulled a boner!" asserted Cohen positively, never dreaming that this could be the very Miss Kent for whom the letter had been originally intended. "Any Miss Kent whom you may have around here is not the one at our camp. I don't see why you postmasters are so officious. You're all the time sending letters to where you think folks are, instead of trusting to the sender of the letter to know what he's about. Where does this local Miss Kent live?"

"Up at Morton's," replied the postmaster. "And I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Jones, that it happened."

"You ought to be," snarled Cohen, hastening out the door.

Jumping into his expensive foreign runabout, he fairly flew up the road toward Morton's. On the way, he passed a young man trudging along the same road, but took no particular note of him, so intent was he on one special quest.

Presently he overtook a Ford beach wagon driven by a young girl. She was alone in the car.

"Oh, Miss Kent!" he sang out.

The girl looked back, then stopped her car. Cohen came to a stop just behind her, hopped out, and hastened to the side of the beach wagon.

He was handsome and quite evidently a gentleman. His runabout bespoke respectability. And he acted as though he were acquainted with her.

"Yes?" she asked tentatively.

"Miss Kent," said he, "you have just received a letter—"

"What do *you* know of that letter?" she demanded.

Instantly he had an intuition that she must be the Miss Kent for whom the letter had been intended. By some remarkable mischance, all the trouble which he had taken in order to readdress Eliot Endicott's letter, by occult means, so that it would be forwarded to Bartlett, New Hampshire, had merely resulted in the letter going more speedily and directly to its original addressee than it would have gone, if he had let it alone.

Aaron Cohen was in a quandary. Had this girl yet read the letter? If so, the readdressing might give her—or the authorities—some clew as to the whereabouts of young Endicott; and Aaron's inquiries would serve as further clews. But if she hadn't yet read the letter, he must by all means continue the pretense of the existence of a girl of the same name at his camp, in order to get the letter away from Helyn unread. So first he must find out how much she knew.

These thoughts raced through his mind in an instant, and he continued, "Miss Kent, have you read that letter?"

If not, he could claim that his anxiety was due to its being a very confidential communication for his alleged Helyn Kent.

But she had read the letter, and had been thoroughly shocked by its contents; so she now became suspicious and apprehensive.

"Who are you?" she asked, drawing away from him. "And what do you know about any letter?"

So she had read the letter! That was instantly evident. Well, then, he must change his tactics; and quickly, too.

"I know a great deal, my dear young lady," he suavely replied, "for I am an operative from the Department of Justice. Eliot Endicott—"

She started visibly at the name.

Cohen smiled, and went on, "Endicott left another note, which has fallen into the Department's hands. It began with the words, 'I have written Helyn—' and was never finished. The Department at once ascertained that you are the only known person of that name in his circle of friends. The authorities located you at Bartlett. I happened to be in the vicinity, so they phoned me and explained the situation, and here I am. Very simple, isn't it? We must act quickly, if we would save your friend, who is in the hands of a band of desperate criminals. Does the letter contain any information as to where the young man is?"

IT sounded plausible enough. But some intuition warned Helyn to be careful. She did not want to offend this nice young man if he were truly a Secret Service agent; neither did she want to take any chances.

So she replied most disarmingly, "The letter does contain what I believe to be important information. I was hurrying home to show it to father, when you overtook me. We are staying at Morton's, as you probably know. It's nearer than town; and, as you say, we must act quickly. Won't you come along? You can use the Morton phone, and father can undoubtedly help you with some ideas. He is quite a clever lawyer."

Cohen pretended to be slightly offended, though still gracious.

"I can see that you don't quite trust me," said he, "and you are very wise not to. In an emergency like this, I wouldn't trust anybody myself, until he had conclusively proved himself to be an operative of the Department."

He paused for a moment, studying her face with a quizzical smile. Then, "Would you like to see my credentials?"

She murmured some kind of an apology, which he took for an assent.

"This will convince you, I am sure," said he.

Reaching into one of his pockets, he produced a small object which he held up to her. Eagerly she leaned forward out of the car, to see what it was. But it seemed to be merely something oval and white, about the size of a bird egg.

Puzzled, she raised her eyes inquiringly to his; and at just that instant, he pushed the round white object under her nose, and crunched the capsule between his thumb and fingers.

Without a sound, Helyn Kent pitched forward unconscious out of her beach wagon, and Cohen caught her as she fell.

Then Lawrence Larrabee came plodding up the hill behind them.

CHAPTER VI.

HOT ON THE TRAIL.

THE moment that Helyn Kent succumbed to the powerful anæsthetic contained in the capsule which the prime minister of the "Great Three" had squeezed under her nose, Cohen caught her in his arms, thrust her back into her beach wagon, and jumped in beside her.

When Lawrence Larrabee reached the spot, on his trudging hike toward Morton's, the beach wagon was already disappearing in a cloud of dust

up the road. Larry passed Cohen's runabout, standing deserted in the middle of the road, and trudged on. He mildly wondered what that car was doing there, and what had become of its occupant—being a reporter, it was natural for him to wonder about things—but he was far too engrossed with his quest for the missing Eliot Endicott, and incidentally the beautiful girl whom he had seen and admired on the train, to waste much thought on such an apparently irrelevant phenomenon as a foreign-built roadster standing deserted in the middle of a New Hampshire woods road.

The Morton camp turned out to be quite a palatial establishment—not at all the mere log cabin which Larry had expected. He rang the bell and inquired for Miss Kent, only to be told that she wasn't at home. He felt a distinct shock of disappointment.

He felt aggrieved, but of course it was natural that she should be out—to him. Undoubtedly she had noticed his interest in her on the train, and had resented it. She might even have recognized him in the post office that afternoon, and again resented his interest. Probably she had seen him approaching the camp, and so had given orders to the servants that he was not to be admitted.

He mumbled something and turned away from the door.

Yet it was imperative that he see her, and at once! For she and he possessed between them all the clews that there were as to what had become of Eliot Endicott. But how was he to go about seeing her?

There suddenly came over him the futility of his entire trip to Morton's. He realized now that he had tramped all this way, not on the trail of the missing assistant U. S. attorney, as he had kidded himself into believing, but rather merely for an excuse to make the acquaintance of Helyn Kent. What he ought to have done was to have communicated at once with his paper, the *Post,* and thus scooped the other papers before the Kents got word to the authorities, and the authorities gave out a statement.

But now that he was here, would it not be better to coöperate with the Kents—if he could persuade them to coöperate with him—and thus be in touch with whatever moves they might make? Besides, this would give him a chance to meet Helyn. It was not hard for him to convince himself.

So he fished in his pocket for a piece of paper and scratched the following message:

> My dear Miss Kent:
>
> Please pardon the intrusion, but I am on the trail of Eliot Endicott. I happen to know, never mind how, that you have some valuable information as to his whereabouts. So have I. Can't we pool our information? We must act quickly, if we would save him.
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> Lawrence Larrabee.

Then he once more approached the door, rang the bell, and handed the note to the maid.

"Please give this note to Miss Kent," said he.

"But I told you once that she is out," replied the servant.

"Well, give her this," said Larry, "and I'll bet she won't be out for long."

"Do you want I should give it to her when she gets back?" persisted the maid, quite exasperatingly, it seemed to him.

"I want you should give it to her right now!" mimicked Larry, a bit nettled.

A masculine voice was heard in the hall, saying, "What's all this disturbance about?"

"Please, sir," said the maid, turning away from the door, "it's a young gentleman as has a note for Miss Helyn, and insists that she's in, when I tells him she's out."

Blackstone Kent appeared in the doorway. His brows contracted as he saw and recognized Larry.

"So!" he bellowed. "So it's the young cub who followed us around on the train. May I ask if you are acquainted with my daughter?"

"N-n-no," stammered Larry, "but—"

"Then get out!" interrupted Kent.

"But this is important," insisted the reporter. "Your daughter got a letter—"

"Well, she's not going to get any more," Kent again interrupted.

And taking the note from the hand of the grinning maid, he threw it in Larry's face, and slammed the door.

Larry could have kicked himself. Where was his reportorial instinct? Where was the finesse which had secured him many an interview from persons who were even more forbidding than Blackstone Kent? Well, at least he still had his persistence. He would now do what he ought to have done in the first place.

So he readdressed the note, to Mr. Kent, and for the third time rang the bell.

But Kent surprised him by answering the door in person. Before Larry could recover from this unexpected appearance, the door had been slammed once more, and the note remained still undelivered.

It would do no good to ring and ring; he realized that. So he added a postscript to the note, stuffed it under the door, and turned sadly away. It read:

> P. S.—When you get over your tantrum and have read this note, if you are interested in finding Eliot Endicott, phone me at the hotel in Bartlett.
>
> L. L.

Then Larry tramped back to town in the gathering dusk.

On the way, he met the foreign-built runabout. Cohen was in it this time, driving toward Morton's.

"Careless of him to have parked in the middle of the road like that back there," thought Larry, as he hurried on.

MEANWHILE Aaron Cohen had been busier than ever before in his eventful life. Just beyond the spot where he had administered the knock-out drops to Helyn Kent, there was a side-road leading to the right. Down this, Cohen turned the beach wagon, with the unconscious girl lying crumpled beside him on the seat. By devious wood-paths, known only to himself, he speedily reached his alleged lumber camp, where he turned Helyn over to the hospital authorities.

But first he searched her pockets, and found the incriminating letter. Good! She had not yet shown it to any one. What a narrow escape! Now he had the letter, and young Endicott's sweetheart as well. Quite a haul for one afternoon!

Then he drove the beach wagon to the garage of the lumber camp, where he ordered its complete and immediate dismantling, so as to leave not a single trace to serve as an incriminating clew. One of the garage mechanics drove him, in another car, back to where he had left his own runabout.

There was only one flaw in the

whole situation. The postmaster knew that Cohen had set out to follow Helyn Kent and get from her a letter which Cohen had claimed was meant for some one at his own camp. So it was probable that when Helyn failed to show up, and her family became alarmed and began to make inquiries, the postmaster would tell what he knew, which would result in Aaron's being questioned.

There was but one thing to do: brazen it out. So he sped on to Morton's.

Blackstone Kent answered the door in somewhat of an ill-humor, as he expected to find there the same fresh young man who had been annoying him. But when he saw that it was a handsome and distinguished-looking stranger, evidently a gentleman, the lawyer was much mollified.

"What can I do for you?" he asked in his most affable manner.

"Mr. Kent?" inquired Cohen.

"Yes."

"I am Washington Jones, proprietor of the Jones Lumber Camp near here," Cohen explained.

The two men shook hands

The pretended Mr. Jones then continued, "Mr. Kent, there is a girl at my camp with the same name as your daughter. A very important letter arrived for her this afternoon at the Bartlett post office."

At the mention of "letter," some subconscious idea tried to make contact in Blackstone Kent's mind—but it failed.

Meanwhile Cohen was saying, plausibly enough, "The postmaster being acquainted with your daughter, and never having heard of *my* Miss Kent, gave the letter to your daughter. Is your daughter here?"

"She ought to be by now," replied Kent, "but she's not yet got back from town."

"Strange!" commented Cohen. "For the postmaster told me that she had left the office, bound for here. Well, anyway, when she does return, would you mind sending one of your men right over to my camp with the letter, as it's very important?"

"Won't you step inside and wait, Mr. Jones?" invited Kent hospitably. He was rather taken by this young stranger.

"Thank you, no," replied Cohen, "although I realize that I am putting you to a lot of trouble by having you send the letter over, instead of my waiting here for it. The fact is, I am due at an important business conference back at my office at the lumber camp. So if you would be so good—"

"No trouble at all, I assure you," boomed the lawyer. "Drop around and see us again some time, when you are not so busy."

The two men shook hands, and Aaron Cohen sped away again in his roadster, back to camp. All this time Larry's note to Blackstone Kent lay unnoticed on the doorstep.

Back at the Jones lumber camp, Cohen found that he had unintentionally told one iota of truth to Kent, for a conference was actually in progress.

Dr. Chapin had given to the triumvirate—Boomalayla the winged dragon, Doggo the antman, and Quivven the golden Princess—a brief report of Helyn's capture; and the three were not altogether satisfied with the situation. So Cohen found himself called to explain and justify. He could talk to Quivven and Doggo, but he was forced to use Porovian shorthand with the huge pterodactyl, which slowed up matters considerably, especially as the pterodactyl was the final authority.

Cohen's explanations, however, were accepted. The triumvirate approved readily enough his capture of Helyn, both for the purpose of securing the letter, and for the further purpose of holding her as a hostage for the young assistant district attorney's good behavior. They approved of the tactics which he had pursued to throw Helyn's father off the scent.

But they did not share his confidence that no one else than Helyn had read the letter. Also Chapin had told them something of Blackstone Kent, how he was one of the keenest-minded criminal lawyers of Massachusetts. Now they were likely to have him on their trail, which likelihood boded trouble.

"Leave him to me," asserted Cohen overconfidently.

But the three were not so cocksure.

"All right," exclaimed Cohen, "let's send for Rajindra Singh, and see who's right."

THE three nodded approval, so the young man stepped briskly to a wall-telephone and issued some hurried orders. Then the four of them left the throne-room and walked through the evening shadows to Laboratory No. 7.

Dr. Chapin, Swami Singh and Miss Kent were already there, when they arrived. The girl was seated rigidly in a chair, and the Hindu was making passes across her forehead and in front of her eyes, with both his hands.

"She sleeps," he announced, as they entered. "She will now tell the truth. What do you wish me to ask her?"

Cohen shot a glance, half of malice, half of anticipated triumph, at the doctor. Then pulled a folded letter from one pocket, and handed it to Singh.

"Ask her what this is," said he.

The Hindu repeated the question.

"What is this?" said he, holding it before her.

"A letter," replied Helyn, in the dull voice of one talking in sleep.

"What is it about?" persisted Singh.

In spite of her trance, the girl became agitated.

"My cousin, Eliot, is in trouble. He is in the hands of criminals. He wants me to help him. But I can't. I started home with the letter. But before I could tell father, or any one else, something happened to me. I don't know where I am, but I *must* save Eliot. Please, please help me!"

She turned piteous, pleading, sleepwalker's eyes from one to another of her captors; but their faces remained grim and inexorable.

When she had said the word "cousin," Cohen's looks had fallen. Merely a cousin, was she, and not a sweetheart of young Endicott! But when she asserted that no one else knew of the letter, he smiled triumphantly.

But the triumvirate were not yet convinced.

Said Quivven the Goldenflame, "Ask her if any one except herself has seen the letter."

So the Swami repeated the question.

"No! No!" wailed their captive. "No one. Too bad! Too bad! I put it in my pocket, as soon as I read it myself in the post office, and hurried home to father. But I never got home. And now no one will ever save Eliot!"

"Bring the globe and the projector," commanded Quivven; and soon the room was darkened, and Rajindra Singh stood with one hand on Helyn's forehead, the other on the crystal ball, while all gazed fixedly at the silver movie-screen.

Blurred iridescent clouds swirled across it like the reflections in rippled water. Then gradually the surface calmed, and a picture pieced itself together, the picture of a smoky room filled with men.

"The lobby of the Bartlett Hotel," announced Cohen. "What can that have to do with—"

"Sh!" admonished Quivven. "Watch."

On the screen, one of the men arose from his chair, threw his cigarette into a spittoon, and started up the stairs. The scene shifted and followed him. Up the stairs he went, and down the corridor to a door, which he opened. Switching on the light, he passed inside.

Helyn Kent was watching him with a fixed intent gaze, her poor drugged mind struggling to recollect his identity.

Cohen noticed this and suddenly asked, "Miss Kent, you know that man. Who is he?"

The picture swirled and blurred. The girl shuddered and rubbed one hand across her eyes. The screen became clear and vacant.

"Where am I?" murmured Helyn, awakening.

"You've broken the spell," the black-bearded Hindu whispered reproachfully to Cohen.

"Then put her back under, as quickly as you can," snapped Cohen.

But Dr. Chapin held up his hand, saying, "That's all her health will permit for to-night."

At a nod and a click of approval from Boomalayla, he picked up the bewildered girl in his arms, and strode from the room.

This gave Cohen just the time needed to recover his poise. When the triumvirate turned their faces to him again, he was once more master of the situation.

"There's a complication here which must be investigated at once," he announced. "I'm going to town to find out who that man is, and what he means to Miss Kent, and to Eliot Endicott. Meanwhile Dr. Chapin had better operate at once. Miss Kent must acquire a new-soul, before we run any danger of her sleuth-hound father finding her."

Quivven and Doggo nodded their approval. Boomalayla shrugged his great gray wings. He hadn't heard Cohen's announcement, but the young man's attitude portended action, and the King approved of action.

Soon Cohen was speeding through the night in his powerful roadster. On the seat beside him was the red-haired ape-man. In the rumble seat was another of his thug henchmen, and two pigeons.

CHAPTER VII.

RUTHLESS MEASURES.

BLACKSTONE KENT, though a lawyer, was a typical executive go-getter. He acted first, and did his thinking afterward. He believed with Roosevelt: "Better the wrong thing done promptly, than the right thing done too late."

When his daughter Helyn failed to return home, he first called up every one whom she would be likely to visit, and then drove rapidly to town in his car, and sought the chief of police. Meanwhile Larry's note, which would have gone a long way toward solving the mystery of Helyn's disappearance, still lay unnoticed on the Mortons' doorstep.

Aaron Cohen, with his two seeming

lumberjacks and the two ordinary-looking pigeons, reached the town of Bartlett ahead of Blackstone Kent. Leaving the men and the birds in the car, Aaron entered the hotel, walked briskly to the desk, and ran his finger down the register. Many of the names were familiar to him. Three men, and a man and wife, were not. He dismissed from consideration the man and wife. This narrowed his choice to three names.

Approaching the clerk, who was seated out in the lobby reading a magazine, he handed him a cigar, and started chatting about the weather, business, and the prospects for the summer tourist trade.

Finally, in the same casual manner, he asked, "By the way, Charley, who's the young fellow with black curly hair, and an Irish look to his face, that's staying with you?"

"Oh, his name's John O'Brien," replied the clerk, "but there's something funny about him, Mr. Jones. I'm not supposed to let on to any one, but it's all right, seeing it's you, sir, for I know you won't let it get any further. This evening, when he comes in, he says to me, 'Now don't tell any one else, but if Blackstone Kent—'"

Cohen started at the name, but instantly steeled his face to an expressionless mask, as Charley continued, "'should telephone and inquire for a Mr. Larrabee, please call *me* to the phone.'"

At the word "Larrabee," Cohen started again, but only internally, for he was prepared for something like this, and so his face remained expressionless.

Why, "Laraby" was the name which Jackson had telegraphed from Rockingham Junction! Pigeons had reported that the reporter Larrabee had been in the Federal Building when the packet had been stolen from the office of the district attorney. Pigeons had listened in on Larrabee's conversation with the editor of the Boston *Post*.

Jackson, one of the Boston members of the organization, had been dispatched to follow Larrabee as far as Rockingham Junction, where the reporter had given him the slip and supposedly returned to Boston. Larrabee was known to be on the trail of the missing Eliot Endicott. He was apparently the same young man whom the tapping of Helyn Kent's subconscious mind had thrown on the screen in Laboratory No. 7. Here he was, at their very doorstep, and—what was even more serious—expecting a call from Helyn's father!

This situation required quick action.

Yet Cohen lingered on. He casually inquired about the two other names which he had read in the hotel register. One turned out to be a drug drummer, middle-aged and fat. The other, a noted entomologist, with a long white beard. Cohen pondered the latter's profession, then dismissed them both from consideration.

Nonchalantly he sauntered out of the hotel, and rushed to his parked car, which he then proceeded to drive around the block and into an alley. He knew, from the register, that Larrabee occupied room 31, and from familiarity with the hotel was aware that room 31 was second floor rear. There was a light in only one second floor rear room.

A hurried whispered consultation ensued, and then one of the pigeons fluttered upward in the darkness, to perch for a moment on the sill of the lighted window, and then return. Cohen drew a flash light, and turned

its beam on the bird, which had alighted on the ground beside him.

"Is he there?" he asked.

The bird nodded decidedly.

"Is he armed?"

The bird shook its head.

"Any one with him?"

Again the bird gave a negative answer.

"Up and get him, men," commanded Cohen. "One of you pigeons fly to the sill again, and bring me word if anything goes wrong. The other of you pigeons go on guard at the one end of the alley. I'll watch the other end."

LAWRENCE LARRABEE, tired and disgusted, had decided to go to bed. Acting on one of his famous hunches, he took out of his pocket the envelope, which had enclosed Eliot Endicott's letter to Helyn Kent. This envelope he slid underneath the towel which served as a cover for the top of the bureau.

He was then about to undress, when he noticed a pigeon, fluttering for a moment on his window sill. Strange for a bird to be out at this time of night! But perhaps it had been disturbed from its sleep somewhere in the vicinity.

Then he recalled the pigeons who had stolen the packet from the Federal Building, and those who had spied on him in the editor's office at the Boston *Post*.

He looked once more toward the open window, but the bird was gone. For several minutes he stood watching the window, and puzzling over the occurrence. Then he walked ruminatively over to the window and looked out.

All was dark below, but there seemed to be a man standing at the further end of the alley. Larry leaned far out, to get a better look.

Then suddenly, without warning, a hand was clapped across his mouth, an arm was hooked around his neck, and he was hauled out onto a shed roof just below his window.

Biting and struggling and trying to shout for help, he was forced down onto the roof, where he was promptly bound, gagged, and blindfolded. The last thing that he saw was that a bird was fluttering around the head of the man at the end of the alley, and that the man turned and came toward them.

Then he was lowered off the roof by one pair of strong arms into another, and was carried writhing and struggling to a parked runabout, where he was dumped unceremoniously into the rumble seat. Everything was hurriedly removed from his pockets, and then the car was off and away, one man crouched in the rumble seat beside him, and two others in front.

Larry's hands were not very tightly tied. In the darkness, he groped about behind him, until he happened to feel his own penknife, which must have dropped out of his pocket before his captors searched him. The man beside him wasn't paying much attention, except to hold Larry's head down in his lap. So Larry cautiously, and with as little motion as possible, started sawing through his cords. What little motion there was, was lost in the vibration of the car.

At last he felt that his bonds were all so loosened that, given an even break, he could shake them off at a moment's notice. Now to wait for the said break!

As they droned along through the darkness, there suddenly came a brilliant light, discernible to Larry, even through his bandage. Two differently

pitched horns blared at each other. The runabout skidded violently and lurched far over toward Larry's side, throwing him into a sitting posture out of his captor's lap, and precipitating his captor to the floor of the rumble seat. The runabout slewed into almost a full stop. Larry snatched off his blindfold, stood erect, and jumped.

A few yards further on, the runabout came to a grinding standstill.

"We just squeaked by!" exclaimed Cohen. "That car was sure going hell bent for election! All right, back there, Red?"

Red picked himself up off the floor of the rumble seat.

"No, sir!" he shouted. "That prisoner has fell out!"

With an ejaculation of dismay, Cohen snatched up his flash light and leaped out of the car. His two lumberjacks followed.

The wheel marks showed where they swerved almost into a deep ditch beside the road; and then out again.

"That's where he fell, sir," announced Red.

"Are you sure it was this side he fell on?"

"Yes, sir."

Thick scrub oaks lined the road at this point, but there was not a sound of any fugitive crashing through them.

Sending one man down the ditch in each direction, Cohen stood where he was, and flashed his light first one way and then the other, but Lawrence Larrabee was nowhere to be seen.

Headlights appeared on the road ahead.

"If anything's happened to him, we can't afford to be seen here!" exclaimed Cohen. "Come on!"

So the three leaped into the car and were off in an instant. But as soon as the other auto had passed them, they turned quickly around, and hurried back to renew their search.

BOTH ditches were traversed for some distance in both directions. The lights of their runabout had illuminated the road far ahead of them when they had stopped, and now lighted it for an equal distance the other way. The woods on both sides were too thick to be penetrated without considerable noise. The car which had just passed them had not stopped to pick up any one. For all that they knew, Larry was still securely bound, gagged and blindfolded, and they had found no loose ropes or handkerchiefs in their search.

Their victim had apparently vanished into thin air!

Disgusted and not a little apprehensive, Aaron Cohen called in his forces and drove on to camp.

On arriving there, he roused Dr. Chapin out of bed.

"Did you operate on Helyn Kent?" he asked.

"Did you find out whether she had shown any one that letter?" countered the doctor.

"I'm in command here, Chapin," replied Cohen sternly. "Answer my question."

"No," admitted the doctor. "I thought that she was too weak after your drug and Rajindra's monkey business."

"Could she stand it now?"

"Possibly."

"Could she stand it, if she had to?"

"Well, y-e-s, if she had to."

"Then operate. Operate immediately. Events are moving swiftly, and so we've got to move swiftly. Our whole dream of empire is at stake."

"The letter—"

"Damn the letter! You operate."

"Yes, sir."

Cohen strode out, and went to bed. No need to alarm the triumvirate until morning.

He slept longer than usual, and no one disturbed him.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROBOTS AND NEW-SOULS.

EARLY in the morning Eliot Endicott was summoned before Quivven the Goldenflame. He went, resolved to pretend to fall in with the plans of his captors, and thus to learn as much as possible of their intentions. But when he was ushered into the presence of the golden beauty, her loveliness eclipsed his high resolve. From then on, although he still believed himself to be merely dissembling, an impartial observer of his inner thoughts would have been hard put to determine whether Eliot was deceiving Quivven, or was deceiving himself.

As he entered the throne room and bowed low before the Princess, she smiled down on him and graciously extended one jeweled hand. Seizing it in his, the young man dropped on one knee, and gallantly kissed her hand.

"Arise, Sir Eliot," said she, dimpling with mingled pleasure and amusement. "I like the customs of your planet."

Her voice had the note of another world in it, although her English was perfect.

Endicott arose, still holding her hand, and gazed adoringly into her deep blue eyes. She met his look squarely, with a smile on her lips. And she did not withdraw her hand.

"Come," said she. "I'm going to show you our establishment."

Then, hand in hand, she led him out of the building.

As they walked along together through the dewy New Hampshire woodland morning, she said in her tinkling silver voice, "I am so glad that you are to join us, Eliot Endicott, for you are so unlike the other earth-men whom I have met. You are the first man on this planet whom I really care to know. That is, to know very well. We are going to have a lot of fun together, you and I, Eliot Endicott."

Did she really mean it, or was she just flattering him for a purpose? The young man neither knew nor cared. It was enough just to be walking beside this strange exotic creature in the fresh summer morning, and to hold her warm little hand, and listen to her silver voice. The spell of another world was on him.

"And now," she continued, "I am going to show you how we are rapidly binding to our cause hundreds, yes, thousands, of your fellow countrymen."

THEY entered a building where a number of young men in smocks — professional-looking men — were already at work. One was putting slices of beef through a meat-grinder screwed to the end of a work-bench. As the hamburg filled one small graniteware tray after another, other young men carried the trays out of the room. On a table near by was a grayish naked human corpse face down by the side of which, perched on a high stool, there sat one of the men, with butterfly net in hand, intently watching the corpse's head.

"That man!" gasped Endicott, dropping Quivven's hand, and indicating the dead body. "Did you folks kill him?"

"Oh, no," she replied. "He died a natural death. Men must die, you know, so that their souls may live."

"I've heard this talk of souls or new-souls before," Endicott blurted out. "What does it mean?"

"All in good time. All in good time," Quivven soothed him. "That's what I'm showing you now."

Along the walls of the room were shelves containing many small, fine-meshed cages. Quivven led him over to the shelves. Each cage contained two brown moths, about an inch in length.

"Souls," stated the golden Princess.

"What do you mean?" gasped Endicott in horror.

"Simply that these are souls," explained Quivven, with an impatient patience in her tone. "We breed them here."

"Breed them? Good Heavens! Of course I know the superstition that the human soul goes into a moth when a man dies, but surely you can't breed souls by just breeding moths! Souls are God-given and are placed in each man at birth. They are not tangible things, to be bred in a laboratory."

"Ah, my friend," replied Quivven, with her quaint foreign accent, "there is more to that superstition than you realize. Years ago on the planet Poros —Venus, you Earth-folk call it—the continent of Whoomangia was a desert jungle, inhabited by all sorts of strange and ferocious beasts, warring upon each other. Then, so tradition relates, there came a man named Namllup, probably from some other continent across the boiling seas, although tradition has it that he rose from the ground fully formed.

"Namllup discovered that the grub, the maggot of a certain rare species of moth, if inserted by a simple operation at the base of the brain of an animal, would immediately give that animal a human, or even superhuman, intelligence. Different species react differently. So Namllup started in to breed these moths. Producing moth-larvæ in ever-increasing quantities, he gave 'souls,' as he called them, to the animals of the continent, commencing with the tamer and smaller varieties, and invoking their aid to capture those a little fiercer and wilder, and so on, until there was not a soulless creature on all Whoomangia; except certain water-reptiles, what you call 'fish,' which he bred in large numbers to feed the hordes of his Whoomangs. Namllup founded the great city of Yat, the capital of Whoomangia, and his Whoomangs built it.

"Why do you Earth-men seem so horrified about it? Why, men like Mr. Cohen and Dr. Chapin usually insist on calling them 'new-souls,' to distinguish them from whatever you Earthlings mean by 'souls.' They are perhaps something quite different; but the new-souls impart to the creature in which they are placed a portion of the collective soul of Whoomangia, obedient to the will of its rulers."

"These grubs aren't souls, they are the very opposite of souls. It sounds like a ghastly dream!" interpolated the young attorney.

"Ah, but it is the truth, my friend, as I well know, for I was the first human being of the planet Poros to be given a new-soul, and thus become a Whoomang. An airplane, carrying Doggo the antman and myself, and one other, landed near Yat, on a flight across the boiling seas. Doggo and I were captured and operated upon, although our companion made his escape. So now the Quivven that was, is no more, for I am a Whoomang."

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Eliot Endicott, "that the real *you* is nothing but a little white worm, living at the base of the brain of that beautiful golden body?"

"It is true," she whispered, with averted face; then suddenly smiling up at him quizzically, she ran one soft furry little hand caressingly down his arm, and murmured: "And yet, you like me, don't you, Eliot Endicott?"

He shuddered, hesitated; then with a rush he breathed, "You know I do."

"And you will join us?"

"Gladly," he replied, "if you will be kind to me."

Taking his hand once more in hers, she said, "Come, my friend, and I will show you all."

ONE of the attendants passed near them, with a large bottle labeled "sugar solution," and an eye-dropper, feeding the moths. Another man followed him. Finally the second man stopped at a cage and deftly transferred its inmates to another cage. The emptied cage he then carried away.

"He has found eggs," explained Quivven. "Let us follow him."

So they did. In the next room they saw the man shake out the cage over a black velvet pad. From the débris he carefully selected, with a pair of tweezers, several dozen tiny white spheres, no bigger than pin-heads. These he deposited, about half an inch apart, in one of the trays of hamburg steak, and then placed the tray on one of the shelves.

"John," commanded the golden Princess, "show us the various stages of hatching."

"Yes, your majesty," replied the attendant deferentially. "Here is a tray that has just hatched."

And he indicated one in which some tiny grubs could be seen wriggling. Successive groups of trays contained larger and larger "new-souls," until they came to the final trays, the little creatures in which were fully half an inch long.

"These are ready for the hospital," said the attendant.

"Thank you," said Quivven graciously. Then to Endicott, "And now I shall show you the hospital."

As they were leaving the breedery, the man who was perched on the high stool beside the corpse made a swoop with his butterfly net, and then deftly removed a fluttering little moth, which he transferred to one of the wall cages.

"A female!" he announced triumphantly.

"That's good," asserted Quivven, half to herself. "We were running a bit short on females."

As they wended their way through the camp toward the hospital, Quivven continued her explanation: "We have a dozen or more employment agencies in each of the principal cities of America, and a radio station in most of these cities. Every day hundreds of men apply for service with us. We select those who are unattached and who have the particular qualifications which we may desire.

"These men are then sent to our nearest radio station, from which they are transmitted here, or to one of a number of other similar establishments, just as you yourself were. On their arrival they are brought to the hospital, supposedly for a physical examination, but actually for an operation. Once in our power they cannot escape, for each of our camps is surrounded by barbed wire and patrolled by guards whose instructions are to shoot at sight, and shoot to kill."

By this time they had reached an-

other building, which they entered. At a word from Quivven, a nurse promptly ushered them into an operating room. An operating room, yes; but what with the bustle and efficiency, and the impersonal attitude toward what was going on, it more closely resembled a Ford assembly shop.

Four surgeons in white gowns stood each under a ceiling floodlight, with a table of instruments and antiseptics beside him. There were four rows of rubber-wheeled operating tables, one row leading up to each of four doctors. Each table contained an unconscious human figure swathed in blankets, and was accompanied by a trim little trained nurse. At a sink at one side of the room was an interne, with several trays of the sort which Eliot had seen in the breedery. From these the interne was extracting fat white grubs with a pair of tweezers. Another interne, standing by the side of the first, was washing off the grubs in some kind of mild antiseptic and placing them one by one in individual white saucers, which were then carried by a nurse to supply the four doctors.

As each motionless human form was wheeled up to one of the operators, he quickly turned it over on its face with the assistance of its attending nurse. Then the nurse passed a wet cotton swab over a shaved spot at the back of the head, the surgeon deftly made an incision and inserted a grub, and the nurse applied a bandage and wheeled the victim away, to make room for another.

And every face in the establishment was the expressionless face of a robot!

ELIOT ENDICOTT shuddered. A huge factory this was for turning our human beings, at the rate of one a minute, day and night, into animals of another world! And to what end?

Quivven saw his look, and the little hand tightened in his. Eliot looked down at her, and forgot his horror.

Then a question suggested itself.

"What do you do with them all?" he asked. "I should think that this camp would soon be unable to hold them, and that any undue growth of your camp would attract attention."

Quivven replied, "Some of them we send out into the world, subject to call. With some, we man our ever-expanding interests: factories, farms, rum-runners, espionage. Some we employ here in actual lumbering, just to keep up appearances. But, even so, as you have surmised, our army grows faster than we have any immediate use for them; accordingly, we place our surplus men in storage. Come I will show you."

They followed the four lines of operated-on humanity which were being wheeled out of the room. Just outside the door was a desk, at which a nurse sat with pen and record book. By her side stood an interne, examining the cards with which each wheeled-table was tagged.

"Storehouse... Ward 1... Ward 3... Storehouse... Storehouse... Ward 3... Storehouse..." he droned.

"He's sorting them out," Quivven explained. "Ward 1 is where our important recruits, our specialists, convalesce. Ward 2 is for the women. Ward 3 is for such hunkies as we have immediate use for. Very important individuals, such as you, are cared for in private wards. All the rest go into storage."

They followed the wheeled tables which had been designated for "storehouse," into an operating-room, a larger one, and with more surgeons.

"This is a longer, slower process," explained Quivven. Then turning to a rather elderly man, with a pointed brown beard, she said, "Dr. Ronk, this is Mr. Endicott, a new member."

As the two men shook hands, Eliot studied the face of the other with interest. It was a rather sad face, with large eyes, which seemed to hide behind their animal dullness, a personality of deep-set pain struggling to assert itself.

"Dr. Ronk," said Quivven, "will you please explain the process to Mr. Endicott."

"Delighted," replied the physician in a monotone, leading the way to one of the operating tables.

The operating surgeon was at the moment making an incision in the right forearm of the patent, exposing a large vein and a large artery. Each of these he slit, and inserted in each the glass end of a long rubber tube. The tubes ran to an electric pump, two tanks, and some dials. He started the pump.

"You see," explained Dr. Ronk, in a classroom tone, "he is pumping blood out of the median basal vein, and is pumping Chapin-solution into the radial artery. We used to do it the other way around, but we have found that the tissues cleanse more readily this way."

"And what is Chapin-solution?" asked the young man.

"An invention of our own chief surgeon, Dr. Victor Chapin," replied Ronk. "It is normal saline solution and glucose, plus a hormone which, so Dr. Chapin discovered, would completely inhibit the generation of red blood corpuscles in the bone marrow. Also there is added a strong, but temporary, heart stimulant. The result is that the heart of the patient keeps on beating, long enough for us to drain every drop of blood from his body, and to complete the substitution of our colorless inert solution."

HE paused, and stooped to study the flow through one of the glass pipes.

"See!" he announced. "We are getting almost pure solution out now. His circulatory system has been washed almost clean."

"It seems to me," interrupted Eliot Endicott, "that I once read something very much like this in a fantastic story."

"Quite likely," admitted Dr. Ronk, "for we ourselves got the suggestion from just such a story; but only the general broad suggestion, for the details in the story were preposterous. In the story, the blood was pumped out and saved. That would be absurd. The blood mixes with the injected solution, as you see; and furthermore, even if it came out pure, it couldn't possibly keep, for the corpuscles would die. Then, too, no mere internal injection could preserve the body."

"How, then, do you manage to preserve it?" asked the attorney.

"Wait and see," was the tantalizing reply.

Several minutes later, the doctor who was in charge of this particular patient, stopped the pump, withdrew the tubes, and painted the wound with a small brush.

Dr. Ronk explained: "We have to seal the cuts, for there are no red corpuscles left to coagulate—or, as you would call it, to form a scab—even if we used adrenalin."

The body was then wheeled away, and another patient brought up. Dr. Ronk, Quivven and Endicott followed the first body. The nurse strapped some apparatus to the left forearm, the

one which had not been operated upon. A rubber tube led from the arm to a dial, on which a needle quivered and pulsated with clocklike regularity.

"This is a sphygmomanometer," announced the physician.

Gradually the movements of the pointer became fainter and fainter.

"Is he dead?" asked Endicott, in an awed voice.

"For the present," Quivven assured him.

Two workmen wheeled in a long narrow glass tank on a truck. At a signal from the nurse, they lifted the inert body and placed it in the tank. A piece of garden hose, ending in a spigot, hung from the ceiling. Turning on the spigot, the nurse filled the tank, until the body was submerged.

"Water-glass," explained Dr. Ronk. "In technical language, sodium silicate. What they preserve eggs in, you know."

The workmen wheeled out the tank.

"It now goes to the storehouse," continued Dr. Ronk, "until we need it again. It will keep indefinitely."

Endicott shuddered. "But how do you resuscitate one of those bodies?"

"Very simple," replied the doctor. "We take it out of its tank; we inject some heart-stimulant, a little fresh human blood, and a hormone which stimulates both the propagation of red corpuscles in the marrow and the multiplying of the white corpuscles in the blood; and then we apply artificial respiration by means of a pulmotor. The patient comes to life immediately, but is very weak until his blood approaches normal. The recovery, however, is always steady, although it takes several weeks, and the patient has to be watched constantly for the first few days, to guard against a relapse. We lose only about two per cent."

Quivven and Eliot thanked him and withdrew. On their way to the Administration Building, they stopped for a moment to glance in through the door of a small building which Quivven called the "schoolhouse." On rows of benches inside, there sat or stood a queer mixture of animals: pigeons, rats, dogs of various sizes and breeds, and a few other assorted varieties of birds and beasts. The animals were intently watching a woman who was writing on a blackboard at one end of the room.

"WHAT'S it all about?" asked Endicott in astonishment.

The golden Princess replied, "These animals have all been operated upon, much as those humans whom you have just seen. The insertion of the moth-grubs gives these beasts an intelligence equal to ours, but of course no knowledge. However, they can be taught to read and write in a very few months. We teach them Porovian shorthand and English."

"But how can you get one of those large grubs into the tiny brain of a rat or pigeon?"

"We can't, so we have perfected a special stunted variety of moth for that purpose."

Then they continued on their way to the Administration Building, where they entered the throne room. It was empty. Quivven sat down on the scarlet throne, and motioned the young man to a seat beside her.

"Eliot Endicott," said she in her alluring, exotic voice, placing one hand confidingly on his arm, "do you now see why it is that we are invincible? At several headquarters such as this our army is growing steadily, night and day. Every Whoomang, from the lowliest to the highest, is of unquestioned

and unquestionable loyalty to our cause, a loyalty that cannot be shaken or bought off. Can that be said of any *human* undertaking?"

Eliot shook his head, then asked, "But what is it all about—Quivven?"

"You ask that, do you, Eliot?" said she. "What of your investigation of our activities? I have read your report. It arrived here by the matter-transmitting apparatus, the morning after you did. It is very complete and thorough. I shudder to think what might have happened to us, if we hadn't captured you and stolen your report."

"Now you're making fun of me," said he, sheepishly.

"Indeed I'm not," she asserted. "It was a very good report—as far as it went. Did it not suggest to you what we are after?"

"Crime, bank-robberies, pay roll holdups, bootlegging, rum-running, loot, kidnaping. That doesn't sound like you, at all, Quivven!"

"Nor is it like me," the girl replied. "Crime is but a means to our end. Our object is empire! And when Boomalayla and Doggo and I divide the world between us, I want a man, a human man, to sit on the throne beside me—as you are sitting now, Eliot Endicott. Will you follow me to victory, and then be my prince-consort when the victory has been won?"

She lowered her voice and looked at him shyly, almost beseechingly. And hers was more than human beauty.

"Quivven, dear," exclaimed the enamored Endicott giddily, "I will follow you anywhere, and will sit at your feet until eternity."

"At my *side*, Eliot," said she, proudly.

"I will even become a Whoomang for your sake" he continued. Then suddenly a shadow of doubt passed across his face, and he said, "And yet —I won't be *me* any more, when they've given me a 'new-soul.' I may not be even human. Why, look, Quivven! Look at all these people in your organization! You and Aaron Cohen, and Dr. Chapin are the only ones who seem fully human. Swami Singh and Dr. Ronk are partly so. All the rest are mere animals, human machines, robots! You said, yourself, that I was the only interesting human being whom you had ever met. Have you ever met any human beings, Quivven? These around you are all denatured humans, automatons, Whoomangs with moth-grub souls!"

"You have given me food for thought," said the golden Princess levelly. "Cohen is not a Whoomang. He is without a new-soul, or still has his own soul, whichever you prefer to call it. That was a part of his compact when he brought us to this Earth. This leaves Dr. Chapin and myself as the only Whoomangs, out of thousands, who were not somehow stunted and blasted by the process. Will you trust me and follow me blindly, whichever way I decide?"

"I will trust you with my soul itself," promised the infatuated Endicott, throwing overboard all loyalty to the menaced nation whose respected official he had been.

QUIVVEN brightened. "Then, my consort, let me show you what it is to rule."

She pressed a button in the arm of the throne, and an obsequious lackey entered the room.

"Any reports?" she inquired regally.

"Yes, your majesty, the Speriden Company pay roll."

Presently there entered a rather alert-looking young male robot, who after making due obeisance, related a robbery of the night before.

The crime had really been absurdly simple. The organization had learned, through a member planted as an employee of the engineering force at the Speriden factory, that the vault in the main office-building had a mere wooden floor, although the ceiling and walls were brick. The pay roll money was always kept in a safe in this vault the night before pay day.

The planted employee knew the combination of the safe, but of course could not get into the vault, or even into the office building, at night. Armed watchmen, on their rounds, passed under and over and around the vault at frequent intervals. The vault door had a burglar alarm.

So, for weeks, Whoomang rats, with supremely intelligent moth-grub "new-souls," had gnawed a passageway, from a dark alley near by, through wall and floor, into a cupboard near the safe. This cupboard had a spring lock, and was one but seldom opened. Last night it had been left purposely ajar by the planted employee.

As soon as the vault was closed, at the five o'clock whistle, the rats, waiting in the cupboard, rushed out. They had a flash light with them. They rolled it out onto the floor, and pushed the button with their paws. A box had been placed near the safe for their convenience. Pushing it in place and mounting it, they quickly turned the knob. Long before morning, thirty thousand dollars was carted through the rat-hole in the wall to the alley, where at the last moment an automobile dashed in and picked it up. There was not a single clew to show where the money had gone. It might be months before any one would pull a drawer clear out of the cupboard and discover the gnawed hole, and even then no one would be likely to associate it with the robbery.

The story had a finishing touch of humor: the police detectives reported that it was undoubtedly "an inside job."

"Add that to your collection, my friend," said Quivven sweetly to Endicott, when the narrator had concluded. "Does not this throw considerable light on some of the cases which you have investigated? And now, Eliot, go to your room. I shall send for you presently. Meanwhile, never for one instant let go of the fact that you are mine."

She pressed his hand good-by, and he departed, to walk dazedly back to his quarters at the hospital.

The spell of the fragrant presence of Quivven the Goldenflame had lifted somewhat in the face of this familiar subject of pay roll robbery. He felt let down, oppressed. The full enormity of his guilt was just beginning to dawn upon him. He, Eliot Endicott, Assistant U. S. District Attorney, sworn to support the Constitution and laws of his country, had just pledged allegiance to an alien invader! And yet how sweet, how beautiful she was! His Quivven!

As soon as he was in his room, he stood in front of the dresser mirror, and held a hand-glass behind his head, in search of an excuse for his perfidy. But there was no scar, no shaved spot there. His soul was his own; he was still human, and hence fully responsible for his acts. He flung himself on his cot in bitter conflict with himself.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

It was such a fight as men yearn to see and never do

The Jungle Arena

In a fantastic ring in Panama's steaming wilderness the two greatest heavyweights—and bitterest enemies—face each other, with death the loser's share

By LIEUT. JOHN HOPPER

THE first sergeant of Battery B, —th Coast Artillery, stuck his head into the captain's office and announced:

"A new recruit just came, sir."

"Send him in," directed Captain Jones.

A moment later a tall young man, whose uniform consisted of the abominable shoddy garments of first issue, stood uneasily before the captain's desk. He saluted, and embarked precariously upon the speech in which the first sergeant had rehearsed him outside the door:

"Sir, Private Gibner reports to Battery B."

The gray-haired captain looked up from his papers.

"What name did you say?"

"Gibner, sir."

The captain's blue eyes of chilled steel deliberately examined the recruit. Beneath the woolens, rumpled and stained from cramped days in a transport's hold, the officer noted a lithe, well-muscled, well-proportioned body. He looked into eyes as deep and as coldly blue as his own.

"I hear," said the captain, holding the recruit's eyes to his, "that you are a boxer."

Gibner started. For an instant his eyes wavered. Then he replied: "Yes,

sir. Some. I boxed a little before I came into the army."

"'Some,'" repeated Captain Jones dryly, while a faint twinkle sprang into life in the grim blue of his eyes. "Let's see." His voice took on a half-recollective, half-mocking tone. "You knocked out Bob Plymouth, eighth round, in Brooklyn. Then you polished off Dutch Heindricks in the second round at Philly. There was one more man between you and the championship. You were all set to fight him in Chicago—and something happened. The fight fell through. There was a lot of talk in the newspapers. Some said that you were to blame. Others blamed it on the other fellow. What was his name? Oh, yes—Smith, 'Mauler' Smith. Right?"

A sullen look, tinged with astonishment and defiance, settled on the recruit's face, which usually bore an expression that was pleasant and frank.

"You got me mixed up with somebody else," the recruit muttered, and added with a trace of a sneer: "What do you suppose I'd be in the Army for, if I could fight that good?"

Apparently the recruit had forgotten that he had acquired a new rôle which demanded respectful speech in the presence of a superior. Captain Jones, however, did not seem to notice the attitude of his new recruit. He leaned forward over the desk, pencil poised, pointing directly at Gibner's face.

"People don't give the Army half enough credit," he stated. "We know a lot more than we are credited with knowing. It doesn't matter how I happen to know your history. The fact that I do know is what counts."

The recruit clenched his fists.

"Your name isn't Gibner," Captain Jones went on. "It's something else. Whatever it is doesn't matter a damn to me, as long as you behave yourself as a soldier. Get it?"

Without waiting for Gibner's reply he continued: "I have just a faint idea what made you enlist under an assumed name, for foreign service—the tropics. You came here to Panama for a reason."

The captain was weighing his words, and emphasizing them by stabbing the air with the pencil:

"The newspapers carried some more yarns. Sensational ones. There was a girl mixed up in the quarrel between you and this other fighter. And you got the worst of it."

THE recruit looked as if he were ready to spring at the dapper Captain Jones and annihilate him.

"Take it easy, Gibner," cautioned the captain, not a whit disturbed. In his long Regular Army career he had faced wilder men than this big fighter.

"Most of the murders that occur in this world"—the captain spoke as dryly as if he were explaining a problem in gunnery—"spring from one of three causes: money, thwarted ambition, or women." He paused, narrowing his eyes. Then he shot out:

"The man you're looking for is upstairs this very minute!"

Before the officer's closely-watching eyes the recruit's face visibly paled.

"You mean," the man choked out from a dry throat, "that Mauler is here, now?"

Captain Jones nodded.

"Yes. Only, like you, he has a different name. Brown. Bill Brown, he calls himself. After all, Brown is not so very different from Smith. There are a lot of both in every telephone book . . . He came down here about three months ago."

The recruit seemed not to be listen-

ing. His eyes were gleaming with a light that was almost maniacal. Both fists were raised in front of him, and clenched so fiercely that the knuckles showed white under the skin. His voice was a hoarse growl:

"I'll kill him! I'll kill him—the dirty, lousy—"

"No, you won't!"

The captain's voice, sharp and steady, cut in. As if he were seeing him for the first time, Gibner looked at the neat, grim officer who was now standing behind the desk.

"There'll be no killings in my battery, 'Fighting Ed' Sommers; and don't you ever forget that! You hear?" The captain's voice was sharp, deadly. "It's tough luck, soldier—but I've got your number. If one little thing happens to our friend Brown, you'll wish you had never been born. Understand?"

Their eyes met and held—steel meeting steel. There was no sound, but the scene brought to mind fiercely clashing swords. Then slowly, little by little, the recruit's eyes dropped. There was something relentless and cruel about that iron-gray soldier he was facing. Yet he had no need to be ashamed, for better men than he had fallen before Captain Jones. There was something about that indomitable officer that struck fear into the breasts of those opposing him.

"Yes, sir," Gibner mumbled.

"All right," said Captain Jones, as he reseated himself. His voice was its usual, matter-of-fact, dry tone. No one could have guessed that, an instant before, the small office had been charged with high voltage. "Now I'll give you a break. After all, it does seem that you should get some satisfaction for enlisting in the Army, and coming all the way down here. I am going to give you a chance to get even with Brown."

Gibner, sulky and suspicious, waited for the officer to proceed.

Eying his man warily, judging how his remarks were being received, the captain continued:

"Bill Brown—or Mauler Smith—has been a source of trouble for me. As you probably know better than I, he is a bully of the worst sort. He's a show-off. He wants to boss the roost. That attitude doesn't set very well with the rest of the battery. A raw recruit is supposed to know his place. You can imagine what happened when the old soldiers, the non-coms, tried to put Brown in his place. He licked them all—and how!

"Well, Gibner—that sort of thing just raises hob with any outfit. And mine is no exception. I had thought several times of getting rid of him, until I heard that you were coming down here."

Captain Jones smiled at his latest recruit.

"Down here in the tropics," continued the officer, "we have post boxing bouts, to relieve the monotony of tropical amusements. Even plentiful and wide open booze and light-minded ladies get tiresome after a while, you know. Now, I am thinking it is time we were having another boxing bout. Get what I mean?"

The captain's smile was insinuating. His bright eyes were sparkling.

"YOU want me to fight Mauler—Brown?" asked the recruit, eagerness tensing his massive frame.

"I want you to lick him!" shot back the captain. "I knew your record when you were boxing back in the States. Mauler had a reputation for

being a hard boy, too. But I'm betting you can take him over. Do that little thing for me, soldier, and you'll have made some friends in this outfit."

"I'll kill him!" breathed Gibner.

"That," said the captain, with a grim smile, "is a matter for your own judgment—and the referee's." His voice became brisk, businesslike. "Report to the supply sergeant, Private Gibner, and draw your equipment."

Private Gibner, with more respect and admiration in his heart for Captain Jones than he had ever had for any man, clicked his heavy heels together, saluted smartly, about-faced, and left the room.

For some time after the broad back had been shut out by the door, Captain Jones sat at his desk, smiling to himself.

"Boy," he murmured, "I'll bet old Tex Rickard himself never promoted a fight as quickly as that! Or solved the same number of problems." He chuckled out loud. "Since the champion has retired, we shall have a little championship bout all to ourselves, without benefit of Madison Square Garden, reporters, or stakeholders. This'll be one big event Graham McNamee will miss."

The captain went to the door and threw it open.

"Hey, sergeant!" he called into the outer office. "It's a good thing you're a prize fight fan. I'd hate to think what would have happened—or what we'd have missed—if you hadn't recognized these two birds."

UPSTAIRS in one of the squad rooms a handful of soldiers were lolling on their bunks and trying to keep cool in spite of the midday tropical heat.

"Listen!" a harsh, sneering voice was saying. "There ain't no guy big enough, in this man's army, to boss me around! What the hell! This is a free country, ain't it? Just because a bird's got a couple of stripes on his sleeve, that don't give him no call to hand me any guff. The rest of you guys can take it. That's about all you're good for. But not for me! Hell, if any of those birds ever made as much jack in ten years as I've made in one night, they'd think they was rich! And I ain't exceptin' any captains, neither."

The speaker, a huge, heavy-set bulldog of a man, flipped a cigarette butt into the neat aisle between the two rows of bunks. What did it matter to him that the rule was to keep the squad room floor clean until after retreat?

He leaned back on his bunk, the small, iron bed protestingly creaking at his weight. Up went his broad shoes onto the blanket; shoes still caked with clayey, tropical mud gained at the morning's drill. No non-com would pounce on him to reprove in sizzling words. They had learned better.

From beneath the shaggy eyebrows which met over his thick, flattened nose his small, bloodshot eyes contemptuously swept the row of men seated on the bunk opposite him. What companions for Mauler Smith, who had traveled with the best! Weak, ratty down-and-outers, most of them recruits who had joined the Army of the tropics as a last resort, either to keep out of jail or to escape starving.

Although he hated and despised them, Mauler tolerated them. After all, a man must have some one to talk to, boast to. Especially a man who had something on his mind. The real soldiers of the outfit he belittled and affected to detest. Yet down in his heart he admired them; he wished that they would take him into their com-

pany, into their pleasures. But they would have nothing to do with him.

Mauler's own nature had brought that about. After the adulation of a hero-mad, not too particular public, it had come hard to be ignored; to be treated merely as a recruit, an awkward, unprepossessing one at that. To gain the attention his vanity craved, he had turned to the only means he had—his fists.

He was champion, all right. King of them all. But his court consisted of toadies, weak sisters, those who hated discipline of any kind, those who never could do anything right and never tried, those who spat at non-coms behind their backs. These were the Mauler's intimates, because they derived a mean, rat-like satisfaction in seeing him beat up courageous old-timers, because they knew it galled the non-coms to see them familiar with Brown.

"YEAH," said Brown, flipping away another cigarette with his short, stubby fingers. "One of these days, I'm goin' to get tired of this place, an' blow. Back to the bright lights, the dizzy dames, and easy jack."

"You an' me both, brother," agreed a narrow-chested, thin-faced youth, blowing a huge cloud of smoke through his nose. "A guy's a fool to leave the States."

Several bunks beyond, a trim, clean-limbed corporal rolled over on his bed, gritting his teeth.

A far-away look came into Brown's eyes. Back in the States—what wouldn't he give to be back! To get the feel of canvas under his feet again—to hear the sharp clang of the gong—to be dimly aware of the confused roar of thousands of people, all shouting his name. Champion of the world! Mauler Smith, world's heavyweight champion.

Why not? It could have been Mauler Smith. The champion was retired. Not that he couldn't have licked him anyway, after he put Sommers to sleep . . . A shadow crossed Brown's face.

He'd be damned lucky if he ever dared to go back to the United States again! What a fool he had been! After all, what does one skirt amount to? Not enough to croak a guy for. There were plenty more of them.

The supply sergeant accompanied the new recruit to the head of the stairs.

"Here's your happy home for the next three years, son," he said. "You've been assigned to Corporal Sikovski's squad. Better look him up, and get yourself a bunk." With that parting advice he started down the stairs, leaving the recruit to his own devices.

Ed Gibner—once Fighting Ed Sommers—let his numerous bags and boxes slide to the floor. He slowly surveyed the long room before him. His heart was thumping madly, sending cold chills through his veins. He had reached journey's end!

Here was the goal. Here ended long weeks of fruitless search. It was for this moment that he had lived through agonized days in the hospital. This was the moment of which he had dreamed standing beside the rail of the transport, now staring up at the diamond Southern Cross set in the black velvet sky, now gazing down at the long streaks of phosphorus turned up by the ship's nose.

Somewhere among these men, some of whom were asleep sprawled on their bunks, fully clad, resting from the heat of the mid-tropical day, others sitting

about in groups, talking desultorily—among these was the man he sought.

ALTHOUGH his heart beat wildly, Gibner's mind was strangely calm. He had feared that his hate would overpower him. He had seen himself leaping forward; he had felt the flesh beneath his pounding fists; he had pressed a throat beneath his fingers. Now he was ready to wait. Strange how he trusted that officer! Everything would come about, in time.

He walked slowly down the aisle between the bunks.

"Corporal Sikovski?" he asked of a neat trim non-com who was lying on a bunk, curiously watching the progress of the new recruit.

As in a nightmare, Brown heard the voice which asked that question. In one bound he was out of his bunk. A chalky whiteness showed through the tropical tan on his face. His body trembled visibly.

"Sommers!" he cried.

The fear and unbelief in the cry turned all eyes toward the bully and the new recruit facing him.

"Gibner," corrected Sommers, in a tone so even that it set Brown's teeth on edge.

"You—you—" Brown's words came in gasps.

Gibner, with eyes that bored into Brown's small green ones, slowly advanced. And just as slowly Brown retreated, unable to tear his eyes away from the other's hypnotic gaze.

"Listen, *Smith!*" Gibner's voice was low, almost without passion. "Don't back away like that! I ain't going to hurt you. I ain't got a gun or a knife. I ain't like you.

"I am going to kill you, though. With my bare hands. I'll like that better. You'll know when—you'll have your chance though you don't deserve it. But I'm warning you: don't—try — any — more — gun — stuff! Get me? And don't pull out until I'm through, see?"

Gibner's eyes had taken on a dangerous glitter. Brown stared into them dully, almost stupidly.

The atmosphere in the squad room was tense. The silence was like fragile glass, that any instant might be shattered. Two giants staring at each other, and all the rest of the room watching them in amazement.

Gibner sneered, and turned his back.

Now released from those glittering blue eyes, Brown licked his dry lips and looked about the room. He saw faces regarding him curiously. He saw in them contempt; he had lost prestige. With a leap, he was beside Gibner. His heavy hand wrenched the recruit around.

"You can't bluff me, Sommers!" he yelled. "Any time you're ready—start! And I'll finish what I started in Chicago."

Gibner regarded him with steady gaze.

"It won't be long now," he stated grimly.

THE fighters were in their corners. The white-uniformed referee was leaning back against the ropes, talking down to Captain Jones outside the ring.

"I'll watch 'em, captain," he said. "They won't put anything over on me."

"You'd better!" grinned Captain Jones, his snapping blue eyes on the corner in which Gibner sat. "How would you like to have a murder on your hands?"

"What!" cried the referee. But Captain Jones had already departed,

seeking his ringside seat before some one else claimed it. The referee turned, and slowly sized up the two men in their corners.

Recruit Gibner held out his hands for taping. There was a steady ache in the back of his head. Except for that, he felt as if he were in a dream.

Nothing seemed real. Everything seemed part of another world; a world wherein he was but an indifferent spectator. The bright lamps, glowing down on snow-white canvas; the odd shed with no walls, just posts here and there to hold up the roof; the stands, jammed with white blobs that were faces, stands that were alive and came down on all sides so that he was crowded and could not breathe; in the distance, a large square of pale white that was the movie screen when the shed was fulfilling its ordinary duty as a tropical Army movie house.

Through the space between the top row of heads and the eaves of the roof a hard, white moon, like a spotlight in a tomb, stared unsympathetically and with unreal clarity. A steady tropical breeze found its way even to the ring. Gibner shivered. The breeze, too, was unreal, like a clammy breath from a grave; a breeze, that chilled instead of cooled.

He shook his head impatiently. What was the matter with him? These were the symptoms of a novice embarking upon his first professional fight!

He became angry with himself. Buck fever! Why should he have buck fever? He snorted and clenched his fists, which drew a protesting cry from the man who was taping them. Did he miss the ceaseless roar of thousands of people? Did he miss the dozens of trained handlers, the boasting managers, all the noise, bustle, and excitement which attend a big-time bout?

Or was it because he was going to fight, not for a purse, not for a higher rung on the ladder, but—to kill? Or was it because he was afraid? Not afraid to kill, not afraid of the Mauler, but afraid that he would not win?

Once he would have been confident. He would have been sure that he was going to lick the Mauler, lick the champion, lick anybody. But that was before what happened in Chicago.

He had never thought of meeting Smith in the ring. He had thought that the affair would be settled at the instant they met again—with gun, knife, or rough-and-tumble fight to the finish, no rules governing and no holds barred.

But now, here was Smith across from him, surrounded by his seconds. Here was the squared circle; here were the ropes; here was a referee. And the Mauler was a good fightr. It he hadn't been he would not have stood in Gibner's way to the championship.

For a fraction of a second Gibner allowed his eyes to rest on the Mauler's rugged, ape-like features. He was startled to meet a gaze full of hate, full of deadly determination. No dreaming, no buck fever there!

The momentary contact of glances acted on Gibner like a sudden shower of ice-cold water. The world became real again. Why didn't they ring the bell? Let him tear into that rotten mound of flesh! Let him pound, punch, slash, pummel—*kill!*

He laughed crazily into the face of the man tying the strings of his gloves. A mocking thought had come to him.

"Fight of the century!"

That was the way they'd bill it back in the States. There was no champion; the champion had retired. One of these two men would have been the next champion—back in the States. A

championship fight in a rotten two-by-four tropical movie house two thousand miles south of Broadway. Admission—nothing. Publicity—none. Purse, title, vaudeville contracts—none. Loser's share—death!

THE referee called the two men to the center of the ring. He examined their gloves, cautioned them concerning the rules. Both fighters returned to their corners, hardly aware that they had left them.

The onlookers sensed something unusual in this battle. They all knew Brown, and most of them hated him for his swagger, his domineering ways; hated him because none of them could lick him. They were hoping that this newcomer could, but they knew well enough that he would not stand a show against the man they knew as Brown.

Tense silence.

"Lick him, kid!" gritted a voice behind Gibner, outside the ring.

The bell!

It was a fight. It was such a fight as the onlookers had always yearned to see, and never had. The two men met squarely in the middle of the ring, all fists flying.

"Remember Geraldine!" snarled Gibner. "Now I'm going to kill you!"

"Yah?" sneered the Mauler. "Wonder who's playin' her now? She was pretty low—"

A smash on the lips stopped his foul words; a smash that started the bright red blood welling around the gold teeth and dribbling down the corners of his mouth.

He cursed and spat, and sent a swift, powerful right to Gibner's stomach that would have floored an ordinary man. But Gibner was beyond the feeling of such blows. A film of hate was over his brain; hate that had been bred for long months. He felt no blows strike him, and he felt no shock as his fists met the body of his opponent. Becoming like a demon, his sole desire was to beat into pulp that ugly face in front of him.

An involuntary shout was torn abruptly from the throats of the soldier spectators. Brown was down on one knee, his shaggy head bowed before the relentless rain of blows.

At such times the animal instincts which are in all men leap unnoticed and unhindered to the surface. It was the same animal spirit that urged Roman gladiators to give the sword to their fallen opponents; the same that jeered Louis XVI to his execution. Thumbs down! Knock him out! finish him off—if you can!

The referee, outwardly calm but inwardly horrified at the brutal fury of the contest of which he was the arbitrator, courageously dove in, and by tremendous strength managed to edge Gibner from his half-helpless victim.

"Listen, you!" he cried to the fighter, who was straining against him. "Any more of that and out you go!"

The referee dropped back, barely avoiding the vicious blows of the fighters, who had already closed again with one another.

The bell.

Instinct was strong in these two men who had been bred in the ring. Automatically they dropped their hands on hearing the clang, and before they could change their minds the referee was between them.

With an audible sigh, the watchers leaned back in their seats. Man, what a fight! They'd serve another hitch in the Army before they'd miss it! Spirits were high. Elation bubbled through the crowd. Gibner was the high favor-

ite. At last Brown was getting what he had coming to him.

CAPTAIN JONES cupped his chin in his hand. He and one other man, his first sergeant, were all who possessed the full flavor of the battle. Only they knew that they were watching the two best heavyweights in the world fight. Fight—not box. A fight that would never be entered in boxing history. Out of it would come a champion who would never wear the belt.

Still Captain Jones sighed. He was worried. Never before had he seen the killing light so plainly in men's eyes. What was between these two men? What had forced both to drop out of their profession when they were within one notch of its zenith; that had driven one to assume a false name, to seek to lose his identity in an army, to endeavor to find concealment in the tropics; that had driven the other to follow relentlessly, with murder in his mind?

In the old days boxing contests not infrequently ended with the death of one of the principals. But modern rules and referees have tried to prevent such occurrences. Usually they have.

The officer glanced at the referee—could he control the fight? What if he did? Captain Jones shook his head fretfully. He would still have to cope with the situation. For nothing would satisfy these two men except the death of one. And Captain Jones refused to have a murder in his outfit.

THE bell.

It seemed that the brutal work of the first round had served only to lash the two giants into greater fury. They met like a tiger and a lion over the body of a doe.

Neither bothered to put up much of a guard. They just stood squarely in the center of the ring, never dropping back an inch, and slugged. Ugly red patches glowed angrily over their bodies. Thick blood dripped unheeded from both noses.

The bell signifying the end of the second round still found them in the same position.

Gibner leaned back against the ropes, arms outstretched. His hairy, barrel-like chest was heaving spasmodically. A thousand rivers of blood and sweat coursed his skin. His seconds worked over him frantically.

Through narrowed eyes he studied the man in the opposite corner. Hell! Why did they have to stop that round? Why couldn't they let them go on to fight, fight, fight until he had battered that sneering, big-jowled face; the face that Geraldine—

The bell.

The weakest of the spectators were sickening. Blows were landing with nauseating clumps. Blood splotched the white of the canvas. The referee was frankly worried.

Suddenly there was a chorus of groans. Then tense, agonizing silence. Gibner had been halted, seemingly suspended in mid-air for an instant, by a wicked punch to the stomach. Before he had recovered, Brown had hurled a mighty fist at his jaw.

Gibner was staggering, his arms up to protect his face. Like a ferocious wild cat Brown leaped at him, slashing, pounding. Gibner fell, shaking the platform. On top of him dropped Brown, his merciless fists driving into head, into back, and into sides. Every man in the place was on his feet, silent, regarding with staring eyes the cruel spectacle.

The bell—but Brown gave it no

heed. Here under his hands was the man he hated with all his soul, who had driven him from the fighting game, who had tracked him with murder in his heart over half the world. Sommers wanted to kill him! He did, did he? Now who was doing the killing? Pound—pound—pound—

"Stop—for God's sake!" cried the referee, as he tugged at Brown. A dozen men swarmed into the ring. Bodily they tore Brown, struggling and cursing, from Gibner's back.

Slowly, unsteadily, Gibner rose to his feet. He looked at the Mauler, held back with difficulty by a dozen hands. A spasm of intense hate contracted his heart.

"Let him go!" he cried, placing himself on guard.

At the same instant the referee seized his right wrist and lifted it high in the air.

"Gibner wins!" shouted the referee. "On a foul by Brown."

FOR a full half minute both fighters failed to comprehend the import of the referee's announcement. Then understanding burst on both at the same time.

With a terrible, inarticulate roar of rage the Mauler almost succeeded in tearing loose from the arms that held him. As it was, he dragged the whole group three feet nearer to Gibner.

Fighting Ed Sommers pawed the referee pleadingly with his gloved hands. His voice was hoarse. His speech came brokenly:

"No! No, no! Damn it—*no!*" he screamed. "Don't say that! Anything but that!"

"Let me at the skunk!" shouted Brown, a couple of feet away. "Kill me—will he? I'll kill him! I'll make his mug pretty for his girl to look at!"

The referee remained obdurate. The hands that gripped Brown could not be shaken off. Gibner was the first to realize that this was the end—for now. Calmness returned to him.

"Listen, Mauler," he said. "This ain't all. You'll get another chance—soon—when there ain't no referees nor nothing else. Get me? And we ain't going to stop until I choke that lying, cheating tongue out of your throat."

"Aaaa-aah!" snarled the Mauler, tugging at those who held him.

With a strange lack of conversation the crowd moved out of the building. For the next few days the atmosphere around Gibner and Brown was going to be tense. When would it break? And what was going to be the result?

A frown furrowed the forehead of Captain Jones. His matchmaking had failed. His bluff was worn out. Now the two men would only wait for an opportunity. When would that opportunity be presented? What could he do about it?

APITILESS, scorching sun beat down upon a world of vivid green. Halfway up the vegetation-covered hill, on an overgrown jungle trail, the gun had mired down deep into the gripping tropical mud. With an unholy roaring and clattering, that sent the macaws fleeing through the palm trees screeching protestingly, the ten-ton tractor strove its best. Soldiers, stripped to the waist, their sweat-covered skins plastered copiously with mud, strained behind the gun, offering their puny strength to help that great, grinding engine pulling in front. The tractor coughed thrice in despair, and then quietly quit the job.

Picturesquely and feelingly and generously, in a language heard more frequently in the old Army than in the

new, Captain Jones cursed the gun, the tractor, the tropics, the Army, and all other things of which his fruitful mind could think. His men, scattered about in attitudes of utter weariness, were awed or laughed out loud according to their natures and length of service.

"I wonder whose damned brainstorm it was," he continued, "to put three-inch guns on top of a stinking hill in the middle of the jungles, twenty miles from nowhere! What damned airplane is going to fly over here, anyhow?" His voice died away into an indistinguishable mutter, which saved the more sensitive ears about him.

Wiping his perspiring face upon a grimy sleeve, he cried: "That's all for to-day! Sergeant, fall in the battery!"

With more energy than an observer would have dreamed them capable of, the men fell into ranks at the first sergeant's command. The roll call was taken. The first sergeant faced about and saluted the battery commander:

"Sir, Privates Brown and Gibner are absent."

The most heartfelt, choicest piece of profanity of the day exploded from Captain Jones's lips. Hadn't he enough troubles without those two cutthroats disappearing and probably murdering each other, unmolested, deep in the fastness and solitude of the jungle?

"Who saw them last? Where'd they go?" he shot out.

"I saw 'em early this morning, sir," a voice piped up in the rear rank. "They were goin' into the jungle to see if they could find somethin' to use as a pry pole. It was that time the tractor got stuck at the bottom of the hill."

The officer groaned out loud. That was nine hours ago! Nine hours—alone in the jungles!

"Why wasn't this reported to me before?" the captain raged.

The men were silent, almost sullen. Nobody had thought anything of the recruits' absence; in fact, only the one man had noticed that they were gone. During the day no check had been made, and the men had had other things to think about.

There had been the confusion around the gun, men running here and there for tools, for wood to put in the mudholes. There had been the unmerciful heat, the thirst, the bugs. What did a couple of eggs like Brown and Gibner matter, anyhow? They were over twenty-one. Who was going to play nurse for them? Let 'em pound their heads off, if they felt that way about it.

"All right! Scatter!" barked the captain. "Non-commissioned officers take charge of searching parties. We don't leave here until we find them—so step out!"

It was the men's turn to groan and curse. They had been up with the sun and had put in a hard day in these steaming jungles. Even without this search, before food and rest could be had the battery would have to embark on launches and stand a tiresome, cramped ride across the bay. Damn those recruits! Hope they had killed each other!

THE sun had passed the meridian and was well along in its homeward descent. Still the heat was intense, unbearable. It poured down, making the clothes stick to the body like a mustard plaster. It rose up to the face in waves from the moist, rotting vegetation underfoot.

On all sides the jungle crowded the two men, passively fought to keep them from advancing. Matted brush of a dozen varieties, all intertangled and higher than a man's head, barred their

progress and lacerated their hands, their faces, and their clothes as they tried to force a path. Tough, wrist-thick vines, supporting masses of creepers, depended from lofty, gnarled trees.

For a long, long time now Gibner had known that they were lost. For the first time in his life terror stared him full in the face. He was jungle mad.

Born and reared in city streets, Gibner had never before faced the stark reality of Nature at her worst.

Even his hate for the man in front of him had faded into a forgotten past. It seemed trivial. At times Gibner wondered dully if it were really himself who was being driven by this awful fear. Fear of what?

The man in front stopped for a minute. Automatically, Gibner halted in his tracks. Times such as this were the worst. That silence—silence that you could *hear!* Things moving, rustling—so near, and yet never in sight. Things following, and waiting . . .

Brown was moving again, fighting, hacking with his long-bladed *machete,* forcing a way for himself and never once giving a backward glance at the man following him. Without bothering to halt, he lifted the canteen from its case by his side and took a long, refreshing draft of the warm, flat, but life-saving water.

Gibner tensely watched each minute movement. He jealously heard Brown gulp as the water shot down his throat. Water! Gibner's tongue seemed too large for his mouth. It hurt at the base when he moved it. His mouth felt as though it were lined with glue.

Gibner had carried no canteen with him. Who had ever heard of a place where you couldn't get water? And Brown would see his tongue choke him before he offered him a drink. Brown was enjoying his agony of thirst.

Almost in step with one another, they struggled onward wearily. Fear gnawed more and more alarmingly at Gibner's heart. Soon night would come—that sudden, swift darkness of the tropics. And then—

Curse the Mauler! Always nothing but that broad back of his! Gibner felt hatred rushing into his heart again. Not the old hate, but a new one. That back was so palpably indifferent, so pointedly, intentionally blind to the fears and sufferings of the man to whom it was turned. What wonderful satisfaction it would be to drive a knife up to the hilt in the middle of that back, and watch the thick, red blood gush out!

Hate flamed more brightly than ever in Gibner's mind, and ate fiercely. He longed to give one wild yell of rage and leap upon that massive back before his eyes. Yet fear—fear of the jungle—held him from it. He must suffer the torture of the Mauler's company. It was better than the loneliness of this festering wilderness.

But the time was coming; they would not always be stumbling through this cursed place.

For a time Gibner strove to banish the madness which was usurping his brain, by watching the flashing blade of the *machete,* the long steel knife in Brown's fist, as it rose and fell, hacking down the tangled briers and creepers in the path.

Then his eyes slipped down to the swaying canteen at Brown's hip. It fascinated Gibner. He could almost see the water inside, sloshing around. Good, wet water. He could even hear it gurgle temptingly, enticingly. And he had none!

If he had that canteen for just one

second—if he had just one long pull of the precious water inside—

THEY had plodded into a place of damp coolness. There, age-old trees formed a sort of circle, which kept back the tangled thickets of brush and grasses. Wearily, Brown seated his massive bulk upon a partly-rotted log. The *machete* slipped unheeded to his feet. His hand went to the canteen again, raising it to his mouth. The expression on his face, his actions, gave no indication that he was the least aware of the man thirstily watching him.

Gibner swallowed as the water shot through Brown's gullet. He did not notice the pain which that simple movement caused him. His glittering eyes, in which a tropical madness was beginning to burn, kept themselves fastened on the bottle of water. He was like a starved dog guarding an out-of-reach bone.

Suddenly something within him snapped. Old hatred, new hatred, and above all his madness for the water, mingled within his heated brain.

The Mauler quickly tossed the canteen aside. He leaped to his feet to meet Gibner's rush. His laugh was like a snarl.

"I thought you'd try at last!" the Mauler taunted, as he smashed his heavy fist into Gibner's face. "I got you where I want you, now. Nobody will ever know how this fight came out!"

Gibner staggered back from the blow.

"You dumb fool!" sneered Brown, as he waited for the second attack. "If I was as dumb as you!" He laughed. "I took your jane right out from under your nose. An' that ain't all!"

Gibner hurled himself forward and fought blindly to wrap his arms around the Mauler's body. For several seconds there was a silent, furious struggle. A monkey, which had been curiously watching them since they first entered the grove, now fled, chattering his alarm.

The contest was unequal. Brown had been in the tropics some months before Gibner arrived. This was not the first time that he had been in the jungle. Throughout the long day he had been husbanding his strength. He had had water. He had not been possessed by the same fears which had preyed on Gibner. He had been expecting, waiting for, hoping for this moment.

With all the coolness of a professional boxer, the Mauler fought. He kept clear of the groping hands. At every opening, and there were many, his huge fists flailed out with lightning-like swiftness, and landed with sledge-hammer force.

All about them were the inscrutable mystery and silence of the fetid, brilliant jungle.

EXHAUSTED, Gibner dropped to his knees and then to his hands. Blood streamed from his face to the rotting vegetation of the slippery, moldy ground.

With hardly a mark of battle on him, Brown stood mockingly over his fallen opponent.

"You don't suppose I'm lost, do you?" he sneered. "I've just been leadin' you around. You were too dumb to get wise. Oh, I've fooled you all right! I figured you'd suffer like blazes when you thought you were lost. This country gets you. I knew you didn't have a water bottle. I just waited, an' let nature take her course.

Now I've got you where I want you. I'm goin' to *kill* you, Ed Sommers! I almost did—once. This time I'm goin' to finish the job. An' there ain't nobody ever goin' to know what's happened to you.

"Get up, you comin' champion of the world! Get up, you 'man killer'! Get up, damn you!"

The passionate torrent of words forced Gibner groggily to his feet. The vicious, leering face swam before his eyes. He lurched forward, striking out crazily with his fists.

The Mauler laughed. He stepped back, measuring. A sharp, ominous-sounding *crack* echoed through the shady, silent grove.

With heavy, hobnailed shoe the Mauler kicked the inert body sprawled on the muck underfoot.

"As soon as you get up, Ed Sommers," he said, "we'll try it again—until you don't get up no more."

Brown searched for and found his canteen. It had been hot work, that fight. Mockingly he lifted the bottle in the air, toasting his dazed enemy:

"I got her, Sommers! Mighty nice she was, too—that Geraldine! Too good to marry a flat tire like you. I fooled her like I fooled you. Well, here's to Chicago, kid! It won't be long before I'll be back there. Champ of the world! How's that sound, Fightin' Ed Sommers? An' you'll be makin' fertilizer. Ha, ha, ha!"

Ed Gibner twitched, and rolled over on one side. The lids of his eyes struggled to draw back, and could go no more than halfway. From under them his glazed eyes stared at the man on the log. Consciousness was returning slowly.

So this was the end of the long trail! He had failed. Bitter mental torture closed his eyes for a moment. The heart within him was cracking into bits.

The Mauler was watching with curious, intent eyes. Watching and waiting for him to rise. A little while and it would all be over.

Mauler, the ape. Mauler, the girl-stealer. He had t r i c k e d Geraldine. Then, instead of fighting it out man to man with fists, he had shot her lover and fled.

IT had all been fun for the Mauler. Gerry had been just another girl.

Of course it had been embarrassing that Ed Sommers, to whom she was engaged, found out about it. And the Mauler, yellow in the last analysis, had taken the coward's way and had shot an unarmed man; shot to kill.

For all the hell he had wantonly caused, the Mauler was never to pay. It was bitter; bitter to the very soul of the man lying there on the damp earth, waiting for strength to rise again, to meet his death at the hands of him who had already made Sommers suffer a thousand living deaths.

There could be no justice in the universe—no God.

A shaft of brilliant sunlight found a loophole in the dense foliage of the trees. As though it had been especially focused, it illuminated an object a few feet away from the man on the log. This object caught the sunlight, and like a mirror reflected it full into Sommers's eyes.

The *machete!*

Again Gibner's heart bounded in desperation. If he could somehow, some way, get his hand on that *machete* . . . He forced himself to his hands and knees, and fell flat again. The Mauler laughed.

Gibner tried again, groaning as he did so. P e r h a p s he could fool the

Mauler into believing that he was as weak as he acted.

Now Gibner was steady on all fours. He began to creep, swaying from side to side. He kept his head down. He dared not look forward at the *machete*. He held his breath.

Nearer, nearer.

He could not see the Mauler. What was he doing? He must suspect, he was so silent! Was he waiting, like a cat playing with a mouse, until the handle of the *machete* was just within grasp, when he would leap forward, seize it, laugh, and finish the whole business as a climax to his treachery?

Gibner had lost his direction. He would have to look up. He lifted his head. The knife was there, hardly a yard away!

But that look had been enough to betray his intention to the watching, puzzled Mauler. With a great shout he flung himself at Gibner. At the same instant Gibner reached forward.

The impact of the Mauler's body forced Gibner flat to the ground, but in his hand was the *machete*. Now to use the little remaining strength he had been husbanding. Pray God that it would be enough!

With one great heave that tore an involuntary grunt from him, Gibner threw off the kicking Mauler. The next second both men were on their feet. The Mauler rushed in; huge, grasping arms outstretched.

The *machete* rose and fell.

Fighting Ed Sommers, alias Private Gibner, U. S. A., looked down at the deed his hand had wrought, and then fled blindly from the grove. Bushes gouged his flesh, trees smote him, and yet he staggered on. The fight for the heavyweight championship of the world was over.

THE END.

Primitive Boats

PRIMITIVE craft still survive in remote waters. Men who go adventuring find the Fuegans on the inhospitable shores of the Straits of Magellan still burning out a log in which to do a little pirating. In the Florida Everglades to-day the Seminoles pole their dugout logs. The Esquimaux use the kayak or skin canoe. In New Guinea and on the Madras coast the catamaran, three logs rudely lashed together, affords locomotion.

The Malay proa is a step upward in boat-building, a long, low-lying craft with overhanging bow and stern reminiscent of the Viking ships. The Chinaman continues to wallow along in the junk with mat sails, heavily built, but much favored by pirates in the Indian Ocean and no mean adversary in a scrap. The barangayan of the Philippines, a cross between a bamboo raft and a casco, is propelled by poles, and is tricky to navigate.

The Japanese fishing boat is light, serviceable, scuds along under a spanking spread of sail and is more artistically proportioned than any other boat of its kind in the Seven Seas. On the Hindu Ganges is still seen a boat that has crawled up and down the sacred river for a thousand years and never changed—sacking sail in rags, planks rotting and filthy. The ornate pleasure-barge of antiquity is found in China and India; King Theebaw of Burma had one covered with gold leaf.

Minna Irving.

Mack growled, but his embrace was tenderness itself

Strong Man

Fighting against prejudice and hatred and treachery, war veteran Henri Jugues tries to free his fellow-Cajans from the brutal dictatorship of Barbazonne, czar of the Alabama piney-woods wilderness

By ANTHONY M. RUD

Author of "Big Casino," "The Albino Ogre," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

HENRI JUGUES, a World War veteran, was a Cajan, raised in the Alabama "piney woods," but educated in the North. The Cajans are descendants of French Acadian exiles—the people of Longfellow's poem, "Evangeline"—intermixed with Indian blood.

Henri loved Patricia Reilly, daughter of Mack Reilly, Mobile political boss; but before marrying her he was determined to solve the mystery of his own parentage.

Also, he had a great ambition to overthrow the dictatorship of Jules Barbazonne, the piney woods boss, who was keeping the Cajans in isolation, poverty and ignorance. Henri wanted to bring enlightenment and financial independence to his people by teaching

This story began in the Argosy for May 31.

them to plant profitable crops and by building an automobile road through the forest.

Barbazonne warned the war veteran to keep out of the Cajan woods, and made several ineffectual attempts to have him killed, but Henri pushed into the forbidden territory and began spreading his propaganda.

Additional proof of the strong man's ruthlessness came to Henri when he met Black Warrior, last of the Choctaws—an aged Indian chief whose legs had been shot away by Barbazonne years before in a dispute over a razorback boar.

Being told by the woods boss that Jugues was a prohibition agent trailing moonshiners, Gustav and Pierre Druot sought his life. Henri recognized the two youths in time, however, and won their friendship. Later, their sister Aline confessed her hopeless love for him.

CHAPTER IX.

NEWS FROM THE FIRING-LINE.

"YE say Jugues ain't dead, as they reported? Ye're sure about that? Oh-h, don't be a complete, damn' dumb-bell, Flaherty. Did I say a word about wantin' him beat up or bumped off? Naw-w! I kinda like the young devil, an' he's goin' to get us that road! Naw! Naw! Hey—he's got plenty troubles without you buttin' in. Jest let him be—an' if ye get a chance to wallop that hairy tarantuler, Jules Barbazonne, cut yourself an extra heavy shillalah!"

Smack! The receiver of a long-distance phone on the down town desk of Mack Reilly slammed on to the hook. He glared at it, muttered a few scathing indictments, and then began to smile through the menacing scowl on his forehead.

He swung about in the creaky swivel, confronting a pale-faced girl who had been waiting with pencil moving dazedly above her secretary's notebook. She had not been a full month with Mack Reilly, and so did not realize that when this blustering political boss thundered the loudest and swore the most, he was the least dangerous. Probably he was even happy.

"Miss Murphy!"

"Y-yes, sir?"

"That 'll be all for to-day. G'wan home an' take a holiday. Take two of 'em! There'll be an extry five in your pay envelope next Friday!"

The flabbergasted little mouse of a private secretary stammered thanks and departed with alacrity.

Later, when her blue eyes had regained their normal sparkle and the freckles once more showed through the powder on her pug nose, she thus characterized Mr. Reilly, boss of the Greek politicians who in turn bossed the city of Mobile:

"I think he's the nuttiest guy I ever wor-rked for—but he's nice, jussa same!"

Three pairs of sheer silken hose, bought with the promised extra five dollars, may have had a little something to do with such a decision on her part.

MACK REILLY almost forgot to scowl forbiddingly at the elevator operator, going down. In fact, he thrust a couple of expensive Corona Coronas into the breast pocket of the colored boy's uniform. Later, the boy, his astonished thanks forgotten, would smell them suspiciously and give them to his mammy. He never had smoked a cigar; but she could cut them up and puff them in her pipe.

Mack did not even growl when his chauffeur drove the ancient black touring car recklessly out Government Street. In the back seat he chewed at his cigar which characteristically had gone out almost as soon as lighted.

Cigars were necessary evils to be borne (in public) by a city boss; but Mack rarely finished one. He much preferred his own long-stemmed clay pipe and the reeking black plug that cooked and sizzled in its bowl. But, of course, he smoked that only in his study at home.

A gray-uniformed postman was making his delivery, as the black car swung into the key-shell drive. Mack opened the door and hopped out. He met the mailman in the front, and took over a sheaf of miscellany. Hastily thumbing it through, he came upon a rather dirty oblong envelope, stamped at Citronelle, Alabama, at 3 P.M. on the previous day. Mack squinted at the handwriting, then thrust it away in an inside pocket.

With assumed nonchalance—really an off-handed swagger which made one notice his bowlegs more than usual—he clumped up the stairs to the front gallery.

He strode inside, swore as his derby fell to the floor from the hook at which he sailed it, and then looked about. The main part of the house seemed empty. From the wing in back came a clatter of pans. Negro servants were still dawdling over the breakfast dishes or starting preparations for noon dinner.

"Pat! Pat?"

No answer.

Mack swore. He turned to the stairs, and clumped up to the second floor.

A bedroom door burst open. There was Pat—but even Mack, expecting to have to comfort his daughter as he was, dropped back a pace.

What a change in his girl! Here she was, in kimono and nightgown—not even slippers on her bare feet. Eyes red from weeping. Hair disheveled, falling any-which-way down her back.

"Oh, daddy, is—*is* he—" She could not phrase the final word. Tears streamed again from her eyes.

In spite of all Mack's gruff assurances and her own doubts, Pat Reilly had not slept one night—and was little more than a wreck of the splendid girl who had blown a kiss to her man days earlier—when Henri had driven past on his way to the mysterious woods.

"Naw, Henri ain't dead!" growled the city boss. But his embrace was tenderness itself, as he took the trembling, distraught girl of his flesh into his big, blundering arms.

"He ain't even hurt, honey," Mack went on soothingly, stroking her back, her hair—and looking out, over the years, perhaps wondering if the sweet woman who had married him ever had loved him quite this intensely.

"That damn' Barbazonne was jest lyin' over the phone, o' course, like I said. I got Tim Flaherty on the phone yesterday. This mornin' he called back—an' he says Henri is jest raisin' partickler hell up there in the woods! He's got a lot of them Cajans listenin' to his speech-makin', an' so on—an' it looks pretty good. Jules ain't done a thing, so far. So don't worry none, honey. I—I kinda like your man. If he makes good ye don't have to be ashamed of him none."

"ASHAMED!" That was the one word which could have aroused Pat Reilly. She sprang back, wiped the tears from her eyes, and did her best to frown. But she was too happy. In a minute she was back in Mack's arms, smiling now.

"Oh, daddy!" she breathed. "Daddy—I—I love him!"

"Sure you do—*unh!*" grunted Mack. There was too much Irish honesty in him to countenance a thought that this superb daughter always would stay with him. She must find her mate, must bear children for some man whom Mack himself and she both could respect.

Thus far Mack had not come upon a man he would have preferred over Henri Jugues as a son-in-law—Cajan blood notwithstanding. In fact, the politician, dealing with all kinds of individuals as a daily part of his life, had learned to judge men shrewdly. And Henri, to his notion, stacked up.

"Oh, by the way," said Mack with an attempt at casualness, "I reckon I got a letter to you—mebbe it's from Henri—posted at Cit—"

He got no further. With a cry of delight Patricia almost tore from his hands the letter he proffered. She ripped it open, spread the single sheet.

"Oh, daddy!" she breathed then. "Daddy—oh, he's all right!"

"Thought so," grunted Mack.

"But, daddy! Oh, my dear!" Pat kissed the letter; now she was all smiles and radiance. And Mack knew the endearment had not been addressed to him.

"Guess I gotta see to some of them bills," he announced gruffly, and clumped away to his study—there to fill his pipe and look out through the blue smoke which trickled from his lips.

Jealous as any mother hen with a single chick, sentimental as a schoolgirl viewing her first stage hero, Mack nevertheless possessed a hard-grained fiber of common sense and judgment. What his Pat wanted she should have—even if he had to turn Royal Street up on end and hang Bienville Square on it like a posy! She'd get it, anyhow.

Meanwhile, Pat read and reread the letter, sent down from the woods to the post office by a Cajan courier Henri had been able to trust. The fact that the envelope had been stained and dirtied by the clutch of hands guiltless of soap and water, made no difference at all to the single sheet of contents:

> MY DEAREST:
>
> Thus far things are going fairly well, if slowly. I am a sort of combination of medicine-show faker and Chautauqua lecturer, because the best way to get attention from my people is to give them an entertainment first—then shoot the works. They are diffident and hard to convince; but I've got them arguing among themselves, and that's a good sign.
>
> B. has been pretty troublesome. You know his hog and beef round-up comes along in a month or so now; and he'll raise particular Cain before he lets all this free labor slip away from him.
>
> No word on the other matter as yet. The few times I've brought up the matter of my parentage in a veiled fashion, I have got no results at all. But I feel surer and surer that I'll uncover the secret. And with all my heart I am hoping for the best. I love you!
>
> HENRI.

Pat was all happy smiles. She kissed the letter a second time, then thrust it down against the warm softness above her heart.

CHAPTER X.

THAT CHEAP COMMODITY, DEATH!

THE days went on. Henri planted *trifoliata* for future citrus groves, read aloud to half-comprehending audiences from a number of the government pamphlets dealing with agriculture as it should be practiced on

these hundreds of square miles of pine barrens. There had been almost no happening of import, just a steadily gathering weight of woods opinion in Henri's favor.

The war veteran had slept in a different place each night. His supplies left back there in the cabin where they first had been placed, still were unmolested. Cajan code might countenance killing; but theft was a major crime, one unpardonable.

Even Jules Barbazonne did not dare to destroy the packs Henri had left. If Jules *had* done so and it had become known, the whole woods would have risen against him. And he knew it. In the strong man's wily brain two far more subtle schemes were taking form.

Cunningly he let a rumor percolate to Patricia Reilly to the effect that M. Jugues had made love to a girl of the woods, one Aline Druot, and that Aline's father was insisting on marriage...

Of course Pat did not believe it. She hated the black boy who had told her, and dismissed him instantly. But the horrid suggestion remained...

If Henri had made love to a girl of his people, Pat, the red-head, never would speak to him again—and no matter if her heart did break!

Unaware of the malicious slander, Henri was driving ahead with his great circle through the pine country. As the woods Cajans "went in" to Citronelle, Chatom, or Vinegar Bend but once in two or three months, he had had opportunity to mail only the single letter. Yet certain of his own love, and thinking solely of Patricia, he did not worry. Thus a man—and an ambition! Inseparable, of course.

More and more of the Cajans were listening to him every time he read, and increasing numbers came to see his demonstrations. He was telling them now about the plan for a road from Mobile, the highway through their forests which would link them with the rich tourist stream from the North.

Thus far he had made only a few converts to this project, and these among the younger men and girls. The old-timers, unused to strangers, shrank from adopting any plan which might tear them from their isolation.

Henri had made firm friends of the younger Druots. He had taught Gustav and Pierre the technique of tree grafting and showed them how to make real money at it. Day by day this man they had been sent out to kill had become a greater marvel to them. Their sister had said frankly more than once that she wanted to marry him, too, but they laughed at her with the outspoken unkindliness of youth. Henri Jugues, this great captain from the war, marry a girl of the woods who could not even cook a meal without burning the hawg-'n'-cabbage?

HENRI asked nothing of his listeners except a few days of labor from each able-bodied man. In return he promised much. Now, if they just could be convinced that it was necessary to *own* this land on which they always had squatted—

The advantages and disadvantages of ownership—with the accruing troubles of taxes, jury duty, voting for officers of a strange government which they had always considered a minor enemy—were debated in high woods council and law. No word of these results, or even of the convocations, reached Henri; yet day after day the circle of his auditors grew.

There were silent, bashful men who sidled into the little glade or clearing, who listened through a morning or a

whole day, puffing on their pipes, offering no comments whatsoever.

There were gangling boys, some of whom climbed magnolias or bay trees, hanging on and peering around the limbs—listening to this great man of their people, who actually had been across the great water to fight the traditional enemy of Mother France.

Henri knew a few of the first principles of showmanship; he had learned them in the trenches, where bored or high-strung buddies of the army had demanded sight of his talents on every possible occasion.

Each time he spoke of serious matters, he first acted the mountebank—since prestidigitation and feats of strength caught the attention of these folk. He straightened horseshoes or caused small objects to appear and disappear curiously.

On one occasion he drew a live and kicking jackrabbit from the torn and battered felt hat of Catfish Joe, the half-wit. It was unfortunate humor, but not intentionally cruel. Henri simply had taken the most amazed-looking person nearest to him—and it had chanced to be this buck-toothed, staring fool who would be cast by dire fate in a later rôle too sternly tragic for his limited understanding.

Of course Henri did not foresee the fellow's reaction. When the half-wit glimpsed that kicking thing which apparently had come out of his own hat, he screamed and would have run. But he was not allowed to run; other Cajans saw the joke. They held him until Henri restored the jack rabbit to the sweat-blackened hatband, and replaced the hat on its owner's head—with comment concerning the live animals sometimes to be found running wild on the head of a man . . .

Great stuff, fun for the trenches—but not so wise when given in one stiff dose to a terror-stricken half-wit of the far frontier.

Little imagining the dire consequences, Henri presented a full vaudeville performance that day; he tore in half decks of cards—which he termed "devil's playthings," in deference to the straight-laced code of the woods. He lifted two big woodsmen and walked around with them held shoulder-high and squirming. He picked up a barrel of turpentine pitch and calmly tossed it on a wagon—whereon it would otherwise have been rolled painfully, with much puffing and grunting, up a board incline.

During the ensuing days, hard and exhausting as they were from dawn to dark, Henri added to the small coterie of his personal followers—as well as making hundreds of argumentative half-enemies through the stretches of the woods.

It was too much to hope that he could win all these folk to a new sort of life and a new standard, all at once. Many honestly disagreed — among them Père Druot, who did not think the Cajans ever possibly could benefit by the association with the "cruel damn-Yankees."

Yet a few of the more intelligent not only envisioned the benefits he outlined, but—like evangelical converts of every sort—proceeded to carry this new economic gospel to the reaches of the piney woods.

JULES BARBAZONNE waited. A sort of sinister wisdom had come to him. While Henri went along with his campaign, taking every possible precaution against a surprise attack, Jules kept out of his way.

The time had passed for a quick killing, and the baron of the woods knew

it. A double-barreled, better plan was coming to fruition—one which not only would do for this whippersnapper Jules hated with all the fire and venom of his volatile nature, but would discredit him completely.

When Henri was far up beyond Chatom, Jules moved swiftly. Like a huge, hairy spider he slithered to meet old Père Druot, who had left his corn patch to sit in the shade and mop his brow.

"I have come to speak to you."

In the Cajan tongue, spoken with the unusual slowness reserved for greatest emphasis, this caused the old man's brown-stubbled cheeks to become pale.

Père André Druot had not seen Barbazonne arrive; yet he had been dreading just such a visit. What vengeance now would fall on his family, for sheltering and welcoming Henri Jugues? Père Druot looked up, his eyes slowly widening in apprehension.

Jules stood before him, hands thrust deep in the side pockets of his blue serge jacket. The rich man scowled.

"Welcome, my friend," Druot managed to say. "I—"

"I have not come to bandy courtesies," rasped the heavy-set Cajan in their native dialect. "A young fool from the North has been here with you. Concerning the idiotic ideas he is spreading, you need not concern yourself; I shall deal with them in good time. It might be safer, however, if your sons and daughter paid him no more attention."

"But Jules—" began the old man, spreading his toil-worn hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"*Taisez-vous!*" snapped Barbazonne. "My time is valuable. I have come to tell, not to listen! I do not care for your apologies. I have no quarrel with you or your family—unless you align yourself against me. This young man of whom I speak is a libertine and a liar. His birth was illegitimate—at this moment he follows his heredity. The trail of those poor ones he has ruined—"

Here even mild, kindly Père Druot was moved. He gestured, mumbling in his white mustache, and got creakingly to his feet.

"That is not the truth, my friend," he said. "You are mistaken. Captain Jugues was born in lawful wedlock, and—" The old man paused, frightened by the livid fury which sprang into the swarthy cheeks and black eyes of the moneyed Cajan.

But Jules controlled himself. "Proceed," he ordered softly, the hate which held every fiber of his body making his ordinarily harsh voice subdued and almost pleasant. "You know more than I about the—the birth of this worthless one, perhaps?" Now he was almost purring like some lumpy, overfed cat. "Tell me; I do not wish to believe anything which you know to be false."

There was no guile in Père Druot. He sighed with relief. Forthwith he told the tragic story which had been locked in his memory for more than two decades.

Barbazonne listened with apparent interest and deference—though he knew far more of the tale than the narrator. He had thought that just two others beside himself ever had known or guessed the truth. One had been a doddering Cajan priest who somehow or other had fallen into quicksand and died—bashing in the back of his head as he did so. Strange, of course . . . The other was a crippled, helpless Choctaw—who probably had passed away in the course of the

four or five years Barbazonne had not seen him.

AS far as a man could do so under the circumstances, Père Druot signed his own death warrant with the first sentence of his tale. After that, Barbazonne scarcely listened. His cunning brain was weighing chances, thinking of possibilities—the consequences of murder.

Ten minutes later the woods boss arose to leave. He was all smiles now. He thanked this simple old fellow, shook hands with him in farewell. He spoke words of assurance and of gladness . . .

An hour later Père Druot was dozing beneath a palmetto tree. Barbazonne sneaked up behind the tree . . . the long barrel of a revolver fell on the old man's head. The victim turned over without a sound, face down; he never knew what had hit him.

Jules thrust away his weapon and lifted Druot's feet, dragging him to the nearest "quicky" bog. A shove.

"Go tell it again to the queen of hell!" snarled Barbazonne, and was on his way the same second. He could not afford even a breath of suspicion just now—and he had other, even more pressing business. He was on his way to give certain orders to a half-wit with buck teeth—a poor human thing who would do anything any one suggested.

Perhaps the greatest irony of all lay in the fact that all this had been observed—and by the very tool the strong man now was hastening to employ!

From a thicket the poor human thing known as Catfish Joe watched the whole farce—and understood not a whit. When Barbazonne struck down the simple, unsuspecting old man, Catfish Joe grinned widely. He liked to kill things himself; it was almost his only pleasure.

But a strange notion came to his fraction of a brain. It was not nice at all to swallow muck, to breathe it in. . . . He leaped forward, even as Jules was crashing away through the oak scrub. The noise of the dried leaves underfoot deafened Jules and he was ignorant of the rescue.

Catfish Joe giggled. He was not strong; yet his strength sufficed. He pulled out Père Druot from the smothering muck, and carefully wiped his face with a cotton bandanna. He did not know or care whether the victim was dead; in fact, Catfish Joe had forgotten all the circumstances he just had witnessed. Muck was not nice to breathe, that was all.

A quarter of an hour later Père Druot came to consciousness. He found himself being hugged like a rag doll, to the thin chest of some awful being who sang in a cracked voice:

"Doll-ee, Doll-ee Varden,
Doll-ee, Doll-ee Varden,
Doll-ee, Doll-ee Varden . . ."

Never a variation; just the first line of an old song, over and over again. The buck teeth of Joe Catfish were bared in a hideous smile of contentment.

CHAPTER XI.

TRAPPED.

ALINE DRUOT, dressed in her pitiful, tawdry finery, came swiftly yet furtively from the back door of the cabin. She stopped, peering about, making sure. Her father and Gustav were about here somewhere—unless her elder brother had

yielded again to his newly acquired missionary complex, and gone forth to argue his own half-correct version of Henri's plans.

No one was in sight. That was good; for while her father, mother, and grandmother paid her little or no attention (the code of the woods being so strict, not more than two or three Cajan virgins in a decade ever came to harm), her two brothers began to feel that Captain Henri Jugues was their hero and theirs alone. What claim had their homely, tall sister on such a man?

In reality Aline knew she had none. She never had worn stockings; and it was only in the past two years that she had graduated from burlap sacking bound around her small feet, and was allowed cast-off brogans to wear during the cold weather.

Now, though the oak leaves and pine needles were chill, she sped out swiftly, vaulted the waist-high, hog-tight fence, and thought nothing of her calloused feet.

She was not lovely—she missed that mark by far—but her long, slender legs had taken the suggestion of curves unto themselves. Her arms were full, and not yet bunchy with the muscle that comes from long-continued hard work.

It was her tragedy that she must go these miles—and then, exhausted, listen to the man she loved, later to wend a weary trail back to her home. As a splendid, vibrating animal, she responded to all the physical suggestion of her one girlhood hero, Captain Henri Jugues.

Of course, there was never a thought of Aline in his mind. There never would be. He looked detachedly upon this wild, passionate girl of the hinterland as something exotic, something he had known once but forgotten. He did not take her at all seriously, though her father and her two brothers were his best friends in the woods.

A little way out in the scrub something moved into her path. She drew back in swift alarm; but then she knew that this ambling, slithering creature that came toward her on hands and knees was no enemy. She recognized the crippled old Indian, Black Warrior. Even though his visage and hair were matted with muck, he was unmistakable.

"Oh, you frightened me!" she breathed. "What are you doing—way over here—great chieftain?"

A few thoughtless persons made fun of him behind his back, but nearly all the dwellers of the woods accorded deep respect to this last representative of the tribe which long ago had saved the exiled Cajans from starvation.

Aline Druot herself always had felt veneration for this hideous, wrinkled and crippled oldster. As Black Warrior looked up at her now, his voice was like the croak of the monster bullfrog.

"STAY fast in the home of your fathers!" he admonished. "Do not go again over the long trail which leads to a false love—or folly! Go back! Black Warrior has spoken!"

"But—it—love is not false!" stammered Aline, impressed in spite of the emotion which bade her go to see or even hear from a distance the voice of the man she adored with all her stunted soul.

Black Warrior did not argue. He made a disgusted sound in his throat, wheeled about on his haunches, and was off through the oak and pine, silent as a rusty black bear, which his approach greatly resembled.

Aline caught her breath—and then in a second she shrugged away the warning as something which could have no consequence to her. Was she not bound to a secret tryst with a lover? Was that lover not the most important man this day in all the piney woods?

What did it matter that her war hero neither knew nor cared about the tryst? In the radiations of the glorious strength she had seen him display, was she not secure?

Could she not adore in silence, throwing silent kisses at the muscles of his mighty arms, at the sinews which spread and knotted on shoulders greater than any other man in the world she knew?

Perhaps. Yet there was a force moving then in the woods of which she knew nothing.

She had gone perhaps two miles, treading a deer path which she knew as well as the walk from her doorstep to the creek where she drew buckets of water. Then three men rose suddenly in her path and sprang upon her.

They caught her unawares, threw her backward. Her screams were stifled quickly. She was bound hand and foot. Then one of the three hunkered down, gibbering, and s t r o k i n g her shrinking body, tapping his chin with loose fingers, biting his lower lip with his yellowed buck teeth.

But the two giant black men, rolling the whites of their eyes, quickly put a stop to that. Keeping a Cajan girl from going to a certain place, for a little while—which was what they had been ordered to do—was one thing. But harming any sort of white woman was decidedly different—at least in Alabama! Negroes had been lashed to stakes or burning pitch-pine stumps for far less.

One of the black men took Catfish Joe, slung him up like a hamper of beans, and made off through the woods, paying no heed to the idiot's protests.

And at the same moment, a silent, slithering Indian who made his progress through the woods on all fours, came upon Père Druot, who had fainted against the hog-tight fence of his little corn patch.

JULES BARBAZONNE was very much on the job, as always when he had some "department work," which meant killing he could not deputize—killing, or worse. He met the big black who was taking away Catfish Joe from the scene of the abduction.

A gold eagle and a promise that he never would have to answer for any of this trouble, sufficed for that particular woods Negro.

The black man grinned and sped away, to invest in enough food for another day and enough "shinny" to last him a week. After that period of delightful unconsciousness was over, perhaps another golden eagle might come his way—who could forecast—and who the devil cared, anyway?

Job Loomis, a muscular black Samson, never had questioned the command of his Big Boss, never would. Completely illiterate, happy-go-lucky, Job forgot in a moment his part of this heightening drama of human lives.

In fact, he never did understand. He footed it into Vinegar Bend, and there bought his moonshine from a friend who had aged it all of five days in an oil drum filched from the white folks.

No one knows to this day what really happened after that to Job Loomis; but men who even have smelled the acrid, poisonous piney woods "shinny" will look in the pathetic cemeteries, not in the high-places, for Job.

Barbazonne was not employing any more half measures. He let Catfish Joe guzzle down a whole pint of red liquor from his hip flask—a flask the rich Cajan decided privately to boil thoroughly before filling again. The buck-toothed one grinned hideously, patting his belly where the sudden warmth had made itself felt.

Then Jules questioned the imbecile on the whereabouts of his half-brother, Lonnie—a more personable youth outwardly, yet an unfortunate of even less mental age than Catfish Joe himself.

Lonnie was short, fat from his incessant chewing of raw sugar cane; he beamed vaguely at all the world through wall-eyes as expressionless as two circles of burned cork floating in round plates of skimmed milk. But Barbazonne right now had use for him.

While Catfish Joe possessed the killer's instinct and could be depended on to gibber himself into an attitude of complete ignorance under a pressure of questioning, Lonnie was better for the other half of Barbazonne's sinister scheme. He remembered nothing he saw, and could be depended upon only to repeat a succession of words drilled into his consciousness. A pathetic sort of human parrot—but one who could be adapted to purposes which would have shamed the wickedest parrot brought out of Celebes!

The strong man spoke a succession of harsh commands to Catfish Joe, after learning all that worthy was able to tell. Some gold changed hands; and the buck teeth of the youthful Cajan gaped in a grin of cruelty. He fondled his shotgun.

Barbazonne left him then, after repeating certain directions for a last time, and hastened back through the woods. After an hour or so of search he found the other weak human link in his chain of diabolical destiny.

And Lonnie listened, his wall eyes wide and wondering. Of course Lonnie did not question what he was told over and over by this great leader whom they all feared and respected. How could he?

Jules led him by devious paths back to a ramshackle, overgrown rhombus shanty—and there Lonnie saw for himself what actually seemed a confirmation of the wild tale he had been told.

Just to make sure he would remember long enough, Jules repeated the story in a whisper as they went back halfway. Then the excited half-wit leaped onward, to bring a terrible tale to Pere André, the father of Aline Druot.

Jules went back swiftly and silently. He attracted the attention of the Negro set as guard over the girl. Keeping out of sight, he had this henchman, all unsuspecting, carry the bound captive to another and far more secure fastness. It was a ruse devilishly clever.

Then Jules callously drew his revolver and shot the black man, and dragged his body down for the alligators of the swamp to feast upon. No witnesses.

HENRI JUGUES heard the thunder of a double report while he still was a half mile distant in the woods. This was not a revolver, but a heavy-gauge shotgun. Too heavy! No Cajan ever fired a pair of shells simultaneously at any sort of animal in the woods—save at that animal which walked upright! It was a killing!

Death had stalked so near his elbow that Henri's sensibilities were high-strung. He was tired. He had worked and argued himself into a condition

approaching complete exhaustion. And always the specter of the mighty Barbazonne had been at his elbow.

Henri knew full well that the king of the woods never would give up to progress without a last lethal struggle. The misses made by Barbazonne thus far only would serve to lend additional venom to his undying hatred.

That ear-shaking roar of the shotgun came plainly to Henri. He stopped stock-still—the meaning of the sound holding a knowledge and a hair-prickling premonition for his sense of the woods. Murder!

The sound had come from the sand road, no more than a mile or so from the spot where he had left his own little car. A patch of shrubbery—a faint trail with two ruts that wiggled in and out of the greenery.

Henri ran forward. His arms slipped out of one strap, then the other. His pack fell to the ground. He yanked around his auto rifle, and thumbed off the safety catch. Then ahead of him he saw a furtive, dodging figure—one running almost headlong into him.

"Halt! Stop right there!" commanded Henri, couching the rifle at his hip, finger on the trigger. He was again the company C. O., demanding the surrender of a sector of trench. His face had set in hard lines like those across the features of the stern war god.

But the buck-toothed fugitive only paused and screeched! Then, fumbling up a shotgun, his eyes wide and inflamed with terror, he let loose a second double load of the buckshot he just had fired at an easier mark.

The heavy charges annihilated two or three branches of a dogwood—just back of the spot where Henri had been. But the Cajan ex-captain had dropped prone, and from that position he was pumping aimed shots one after another, into the wild, crazy man who was charging.

Too many enemies here and abroad had attempted the life of Henri Jugues; grimly he shot to kill the moment he was sure of another opponent.

And he killed. Catfish Joe suddenly buckled, and turned a somersault in the grass. He kicked a minute, then lay still.

"Your just deserts—but I wish I knew why!" gritted Henri, slapping in a fresh clip as he passed the latest victim of what seemed a puerile, senseless feud—one out of all proportion to the value of a few herds of hogs and cattle that roamed the piney woods.

But one hundred yards farther on, all thoughts of smallness and futility were swept from the man for good and all. He stopped, appalled. There, smashed and overturned against a pine stump, was a big, black car of a kind almost never seen in these reaches of the woods.

With a cry of horror, Henri ran forward, tossing aside his rifle. He had recognized the car. It was the worn, unpainted touring car belonging to Mack Reilly, father of Patricia, the girl Henri loved!

CHAPTER XII.

BUCKSHOT PLAY NO FAVORITES.

THE big car lay on its side, apparently not badly damaged except for a shattered windshield and a top ripped to tatters by the whirlwind breath of buckshot. But in the attack and in that crash against the stump the intended murder planned by Barbazonne had been accomplished.

Mack Reilly lay there, the left side of his head torn away. Broken arcs

of the wooden steering wheel still were clasped in his hairy hands; and the steering post, splintering, had gouged through the ribs above his heart.

Arms about his dead body, herself mercifully unconscious, Pat Reilly lay in a crumpled heap. Her gray suit was stained irreparably; but as Henri, shocked and cursing in a low voice through tautened lips, lifted her gently away, he saw no wound. He laid her on the ground amid the crisp oak leaves, then went back to Mack Reilly.

There was nothing to be done, of course, save abate in some measure the hideousness of the murder. Henri did the best he could.

Wrapped in the light rug from his own car, Mack was lifted and placed across the curtain rods and back seat partition of the right side of his own car—out of the way of the ants and other destructive creatures of the piney woods, for a short time, at least.

It was all Henri could do for the moment. Two attempts had shown him that even his tremendous strength was insufficient to set back on its wheels the heavy touring car. And he saw that it would be necessary to carry Patricia as quickly as possible to some home like the Druots', where she could have the soothing attention of women who would understand and sympathize.

He supposed that she had fainted from the sheer horror of it all; the buckshot seemingly had passed all to the left, where the driver sat. Probably even the devilish Barbazonne had balked at the slaughter of a young and beautiful woman.

But buckshot play no favorites. Sprayed from the twin muzzles of a gun with one barrel half-choke, the other smooth-bore, they are apt to wander wickedly in a wide pattern—and to smash with murderous malice into any object up to thirty or forty yards.

Within four minutes Henri was back and kneeling beside the unconscious form of Patricia. He lifted her head—and to his unspeakable horror found that the left shoulder of her gray dress was soaked with blood that was warm!

"Great God!" he prayed, inwardly cursing himself for the dumbness of his own delay.

If Barbazonne had killed this girl, there could not be any Cajan hell too deep for him! The slaughter of a known rival who ventured into country forbidden could be excused, perhaps—after the killer was satisfactorily dead, of course—

But murder of a woman—any woman, black or white!—was even less countenanced in the piney woods than in any "civilized" city. People of the woods possessed a certain somber cleanliness of thought, of reflection. They did not kill on impulse—except where their inalienable right to exclude meddlesome strangers was concerned. And these victims certainly had not been meddlesome or trouble-seeking.

HALF sick with love and longing for this girl, Henri pitied her in this so-useless tragedy—why on earth had she and Mack tried to bull their way up here in a heavy car, without letting him know?

With terror striking straight through his heart, the young man tore away the blouse from the shoulder of the unconscious girl. He saw a small artery welling up its blood through a torn gash in the skin of Pat's left arm. That was what had soaked her shoulder, neck and head. For she had been

almost upside down in the car, slumped over the body of her father.

Swiftly Henri went back for his pack, in which he carried a first-aid kit. His fingers trembled—for he loved and wanted this girl above all—but he managed to stanch the blood flow with a skillfully tied bandage.

For the first time in years—and never when his own life was in danger—ex-Captain Henri Jugues prayed for the life of a human being. But this was a human being whom he loved with all his heart and soul!

As a matter of fact, Patricia had only lost a relatively small portion of blood. Her splendid physical self would respond shortly to genuine treatment; but for the time being she was "out," unconscious from shock and weakness.

With safety pins Henri roughly repaired the rent in her blouse, then hastened for a cup of cold water. A little of this he dropped between her parted lips; with the rest he washed away the bloodstains from her face and neck.

She was breathing more regularly now, and the Cajan youth gave silent thanks for the certainty that recovery would be only a matter of minutes. He built a small fire and made a pot of very black coffee. Into a cup of this he measured three ounces of French brandy from his pack flask, lifted her head, and held the steaming liquid to her lips.

Slowly her eyes opened, pain and fright gradually replacing bewilderment.

"Drink this, dear," Henri said soothingly. "Do that first—don't try to think. You've had an accident, but you'll be all right. Trust me."

She complied, and as the hot, potent liquid disappeared a trace of color crept back into her cheeks. Then she drew a little away.

"Daddy—they killed him?" she asked, a break in her voice that revealed just how greatly she had loved the big, gruff Irishman.

Henri nodded somberly. This was a girl from whom the truth of such a catastrophe could not be concealed, and he realized the fact. Gently he told her the main facts of the story, so far as he knew them.

While he was talking, he filled another cup with the same mixture of coffee and high-proof liquor, making Patricia drink it—even though she evidently disliked the flavor.

"That fellow was a tool of Barbazonne?" the girl asked then, in a voice grown stronger.

"I am sure of it. We—"

"I must go—and say good-by to—daddy," Pat announced, and tried to rise. With Henri's assistance she managed to gain her feet, but staggered.

"You were wounded slightly, and lost some blood. I bound it, but you must be careful not to use the arm much until we can have it dressed by a regular doctor. Come. Your father is only a little way. Hold your arm about me—there—and we can make it."

Henri half carried her to the scene of tragedy, where for a little while he allowed her to weep her last farewell to old Mack Reilly.

Then, as the tears began to turn into the shuddering sobs of combined grief and weakness, he drew her away out of sight of the car, and sat down with her in his arms, his back against a fallen log, her face buried in his shoulder.

His hand caressed her hair; and little by little, as the liquor's effect

upon her increased, the sobs quieted. Patricia breathed once tiredly, then relaxed in deep but natural slumber.

As soon as he was sure she would not awaken readily, Henri lifted her in his arms and made off at a steady, even stride toward the woods where he had left his own little car.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GRIM MISTAKE.

WALL-EYED LONNIE, stumbling unsurely and gabbling to himself from the excitement of the tale he had to tell, reached the Druot cabin just as Gustav returned from one of his self-appointed trips to a group of Cajans which Henri himself had not reached.

Throwing his arms excitedly toward the sky, the chubby half-wit talked and shouted so hysterically that at first even the unemotional Gustav Druot merely thought Lonnie was throwing a new and peculiar kind of fit.

But little by little the Cajan lad began to pay attention. Aline's name was mentioned over and over—and she was not in the cabin, at that. A sharp question to his mother evoked the fact that Aline, supposedly staying over with some Cajan neighbor, had been gone all night and this morning on one of these scouting trips to the scene of Henri's demonstrations.

Gustav had not liked these trips, anyway. A certain primitive jealousy made him feel that all Henri did somehow belonged to himself and his brother Pierre, who in a way had discovered him.

Dragging the excited half-wit into the cabin, Gustav, his mother, and grandmother interrogated Lonnie. Their countenances became serious as they glanced at one another. Normally there would be no thought of credence as far as any babblings of Lonnie were concerned. But this time he stuck to his story—well drilled by Barbazonne as he had been.

Aline Druot, he said, had been seized and abducted by Henri Jugues and a giant Negro. She had been tied and gagged and taken out to a woods cabin long deserted. Yes, Lonnie liked Aline. She had been kind to him at times, giving him pretty cut-out pictures from an old Sunday newspaper comic supplement. Lonnie could show them all the cabin where Aline was. He could take them there . . .

Gustav, a gathering thundercloud on his forehead, left them and went into the bedroom where the wounded Père Druot had been put to bed. Then ensued a sharp repetition of the almost incredible story, by the son—and slow, mild-spoken negations by the old man.

Père knew Henri and liked him personally. While he had little belief in the success of the engineer's project in the piney woods, he was of far too simple and kindly a nature to believe that any Cajan whom another Cajan counted friend could violate hospitality and harm his daughter.

Yet Gustav ominously brought to his attention that Aline herself frankly enough had confessed her unrequited attachment for Henri. She had shadowed him for many days, they knew. What if this crazy idiot of a Lonnie actually had seen what he claimed to have seen?

Slowly, weakly Père Druot got out of bed and pulled on his overalls. The two old women still were questioning Lonnie. It was patent that they were reluctantly beginning to believe. Père Druot joined them, leaning on the arm of his son.

The tale was repeated, and little by little the old man's eyes took on a somber, worried expression. He shook his head gravely.

"IT cannot be the truth," he said at last, when Lonnie ran out of breath. "Henri is not the sort to covet our daughter. Yet some of the woods Negroes, drunk on their vile shinny, might have gone mad and—

"Gustav, take you the shotgun—the good one there—and go with this tale-bearer to the cabin he mentions. It doubtless is the one far over on Little Bend. When you find the tale false, bring Lonnie back here. It must not ever be said that the Druots believed a base lie concerning a friend."

Mère Druot took up the single-barreled shotgun dropped by Gustav in favor of the better weapon.

"I shall go along, too," she announced in a disturbed voice. "This man Jugues has been long away from us. What can we know of what vices he learned through those dark days of war? I fear for our Aline!"

Shortly after the two had set forth with the chattering Lonnie as guide, Pierre Druot returned from a trip similar to Gustav's mission. Like Gustav, he had been away overnight in the far reaches, and had not glimpsed Henri, though talking eloquently and inaccurately about him.

Less stable of temperament than his father or elder brother, Pierre grew excited at once. He forced out of the reluctant Père Andre a gist of the tale that had been brought to them.

The old grandmother supplemented this with mumbled forebodings. Were not the foreign women notoriously free-and-easy with soldiers during time of war? And had not this Captain Jugues taken part in that war? Though he was handsome and spoke with a smooth tongue, yet there were many men not to be trusted any farther than one could throw them by the mustaches. She knew what she was talking about!

Pierre danced about excitedly. Had wrong been done to his sister, his precious Aline? Never before had he evinced any inordinate affection for the girl; but now his volatile nature bubbled crimson foam. The honor of the family must be upheld!

If harm had come to her, she would be avenged. He would do this and that! Species of a grub that he had been, not to pull the trigger that time when he first had seen this scurrilous intruder!

Despite the father's attempt to quiet Pierre, the son grabbed his shotgun, seized a square of cold corn pone from the table—even in his excitement he did not forget he was hungry—and raced out.

And as fate would have it, at the precise moment when weary old Père Druot decided that he would have to hobble after them all, to see that no hot-headed violence was done, the lad Pierre came upon four other Cajans in the woods.

These were the Devereauxes—older, rather surly men, shiftless and not well liked by the better element of the woods. But Pierre was not thinking of social distinctions just then. He told them what he believed had happened; and dilated upon the vengeance he, the outraged brother, meant to take when he found the offender.

The four Devereauxes had been on the way to cook themselves a couple of barrels of mash; but if any especial excitement promised they could postpone distilling operations easily enough. With silent glances among

themselves they turned and followed Pierre Druot.

FROM impenetrable covert near the dilapidated cabin where Aline first had been held, Barbazonne listened for sounds of the search party he hoped must soon arrive.

He was slightly uneasy, for Lonnie was a weak reed upon which to lean. Lonnie might find a stick of sugar cane and forget everything he had been taught so patiently. Or if he told the story of the abduction, he might forget the position of the long-deserted cabin.

At any rate, there was this one thing excellent about Lonnie: after a single night he *would* forget the whole affair, his blank mind like a sponged slate. That was insurance for the Cajan schemer.

Jules wondered about Père Druot, also. From one of his henchmen he had learned the astonishing fact that the old man was expected to recover from his "accident"! Then the blow had not been sufficient. Had it left Père with a knowledge of what had gone before? And if so, had he voiced suspicion of Barbazonne to his sons?

That might make affairs uncomfortable for a time, though Jules knew how to make convincing denials. He had been accused many times on stronger evidence, and always had managed to escape punishment—and most times even to avoid the remnants of suspicion.

Another hour passed, and then he sat up alertly. From a thicket of oak scrub had come the unmistakable crackle of some one approaching—some one who was coming in a straight line, paying little attention to stealth or concealment.

Then a guarded warning, "Wait here, *ma mère*. I shall look."

The figure of Gustav Druot emerged. He carried the double-barreled weapon with the stock at the right of his chest. He crouched forward a little, but made directly for the cabin. Opposite the half-open door, which hung crazily upon leather hinges, he halted.

"Who is in there?" he called sharply, and waited.

Five seconds later he called again, then strode to the doorway, poked in the muzzle of the shotgun, and surveyed the interior. There came no sound of altercation. He entered. Several more seconds passed.

Then the woman, unable to restrain her impatience, came out holding the smaller weapon. She walked rapidly to the cabin, followed hesitantly by the half-wit, Lonnie.

"Is she there, my Aline?" she cried.

"No, *ma mère*," answered the muffled voice of Gustav. "Aline is not here—but it looks to me as though some one has left but recently. See here, the earth is trampled by heavy feet. See there—perhaps a body lay there on a blanket. See on this side—"

He was interrupted by a sharp, wailing cry from the woman, who had made a discovery of her own.

"Oh, my poor Aline! Oh! Oh!" she almost screamed. "See, Gustav, the he-devil *has* taken her! It is true! This is the comb she wears in her hair!"

Peering through the covert, Barbazonne chuckled silently to himself as the woman and the youth ran from the cabin, Mère Druot clutching in her fingers a cheap celluloid comb.

ONLY a few moments later, as they started swiftly back on the home trail, they met Pierre and his four companions. The evidence was shown, and Mère Druot wept, im-

ploring them all to rescue Aline and to take vengeance if harm had befallen her.

The men were willing enough, yet they foresaw difficulty. None knew exactly where Henri had made his camp the night before—and they assumed that naturally enough Aline had been taken there.

Père Druot was met by his wife alone. The men had scattered to bear the exciting news to other woods families, and to organize a search party and posse of vengeance. On such an important occasion every woodsman quickly available had a natural right to join in the hunt.

In two hours a band of twenty-eight had assembled, and information gathered as to where Henri had spent the previous night. He probably would not be there now, yet it was a point of departure in the search. Even Père Druot, a light of appalled horror in his features, hobbled with them. It was unbelievable—yet who could deny such evidence?

Two hours passed and they had not found the quarry. First shadows of approaching sunset were gathering about the bases of the blackjacks, when they came to the sand track Henri had spoken of making into a hard-surfaced road.

About to cross, one of the men with sharp ears stopped short and signaled for silence. A moment's wait, and then the labored breathing of a man who has carried a heavy burden far through the sand came to their hearing. They drew back into the scrub.

Striding wearily now, Henri Jugues came toward them—and unmistakably he bore the figure of a girl in his arms!

With a fierce cry the men sprang upon him. Dazed with weariness, his arms aching fiercely, he scarcely comprehended what happened, until he was thrown roughly to the ground and trussed hand and foot.

Père Druot knelt to take the half-awakened girl into his embrace, when suddenly he started back.

"Look!" he cried, his old voice cracking and trembling. "This is not my daughter, my Aline! He has kidnaped himself another! *Mon Dieu!* What a monster he is!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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Watchdog of the Treasury

THE expression "watchdog of the treasury," with which almost every one is familiar, had a very definite origin in the early days of the first United States Mint. For the Mint had a watchdog and he was a real one, of the canine species. His name was Nero and he cost the government three dollars. Nero's job was to guard the property, especially at night. Like Mary's lamb, he went everywhere the watchman went and then some.

It was the watchman's duty to ring a bell every hour through the night, and then send Nero through the yard. Probably the idea was that if Nero made the trip successfully it was safe for the watchman to follow. Nero was a legitimate item of expense to the Mint as its early financial records attest. That was long before the days of the comptroller general and budgets. The cost of Nero's food was charged against the government precisely the same as the rum and beer supplied the employees.—*Randolph S. Hancock.*

"Gosh, and I was just saying this was a dead town!"

Epicures

The innocent bystander is always the fall guy; but in this gangster bombing, drifters Bill and Jim didn't stay innocent long

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

THERE was a dull, muffled boom. Almost simultaneously the front brick wall of a two-story building half a block down the street tottered grotesquely, swayed uncertainly for a moment and then collapsed like a mass of débris being dumped from a gigantic truck.

It was a quiet side street, and no cars or pedestrians were in the path of the falling mass. Two minutes later, however, and Bill and I would have been filling the stellar rôles of innocent bystanders, because we were ambling in that general direction when the blast came.

The brick wall crashed into the street with a roar, and a thick cloud of dust arose. A period of absolute silence ensued. The period was brief, however, for an instant later houses all along the street began disgorging human beings. A door would open, a group of excited persons would be framed in the doorway, and then the group would start running pell-mell toward the pile of débris. In a minute or so the street was filled with people, all running.

Then the raucous blast of a siren sounded in the distance—short blasts, one following closely after the other. Somebody had turned in a fire alarm.

Then the eerie scream of a shriller siren, the clang of bells, and a hook and ladder truck came careening down the street. From the opposite direction, another scream. A second truck was roaring up the street.

"Gosh," murmured Bill, "and I was just telling you this was a dead town."

"We—" I stopped with a grunt as an excited youth, tearing along with eyes focused half a block ahead, crashed against me, knocking the wind out of me temporarily.

"Blanca's gang has bombed Jim Costa's place," he gasped, and continued his mad rush.

"Costa's place has been bombed," shrieked a feminine voice from the upper window of a near-by house, apparently to somebody half a mile away.

An automobile with a driver holding one hand on the horn and both feet on the accelerator sped past with policemen clinging to the running boards on each side, their uniforms fluttering like a Monday's washing hanging out in the backyard during a summer windstorm. A red runabout with a big brass bell mounted over the hood, clanged past. Then another car with blue uniforms bulging from both sides.

BILL and I stood there and let the current of excited humanity rush past us. Everybody was headed in the same direction—everybody with one exception. Coming toward us, breasting the onrushing current, was a disheveled individual, with blackened face and tattered clothing. Mingled terror and determination were depicted on his features.

"There's the bomber trying to make his get-away," gasped Bill; then: "Holy mackerel!" he added. "It's Gus, the hobo who shared his can of stew with us this morning at the camp down near the railroad track. The danged fool! He did a lot of talking, but I never supposed he would pull off a stunt like this."

The disheveled individual spotted us and rushed toward us like a swimmer who has discovered a floating life-preserver just before going down for the third time. There was an appealing look on his face.

"The cops'll be after me in a minute," he gasped.

Bill and I looked at each other in dismay.

"He shared his stew with us—helped out a pair of strange drifters," I whispered.

"Follow us, Gus," said Bill brusquely. "We've hired a room in a place about two blocks over."

We furtively led the way over a side street to the shabby rooming house, with Gus trailing behind. Fortunately nobody paid any attention to us.

The landlady, however, was hovering about in the lower hall. She eyed the three of us suspiciously as we climbed the stairs, but Bill and I, strengthened by the thought that we had paid three days' rent in advance, airily ascended. Poor Gus, though, couldn't conceal the fact that he looked like a dog that had dropped into a coal chute attempting to escape from a sausage-making machine.

"She'll tip off the police, won't she?" whispered Gus hoarsely.

"Probably," sighed Bill, as we slipped into our room and locked the door behind us. "Quick, Gus," he directed, ripping the paper off the bundle which contained our extra pair of trousers and coat. "Change into these. You gave us your stew this morning when we were hungry, and we'll see you through this mess, if we can." He flung the clothing to him.

Gus, his teeth chattering like the castanets in a Spanish minstrel act, got into the pants and coat with a speed that would have done credit to a rookie fireman answering his first three-alarm fire.

"And all my money's gone," he moaned, "Twenty cents. All shot."

"Serves you right," snapped Bill irritably. "Pulling off a fool stunt like that."

"Well, I was—" He paused as a peremptory *rat-a-tat* sounded from below. Bill rushed to the window and looked out.

"The cops," Bill gasped. "The landlady picked you for a suspicious character and squealed on us."

There was a sound of the front door opening.

"Quick!" whispered Bill. He opened the door of the room and led the way toward the rear of the house. A window at the end of the hall opened on the roof of a back porch.

Bill raised the sash and we clambered out. It was a fifteen-foot drop to the yard below, but we didn't hesitate. We could hear footsteps in the hall behind us.

We rushed through the yard and clambered over a fence at the other end. We got to the other side just as a shot rang out from the direction of the house. Something smacked against the fence and a hole mysteriously appeared in one of the boards within a few inches of where I had landed. We didn't stop to probe the hole, however, but scurried along under cover of the fence and emerged into an alley leading into a dingy side street.

Nobody was in sight except a shifty-eyed individual who was just emerging from a shabby house on the other side of the street. He gave us one hurried glance and then darted back into the house. He seemed as anxious to avoid us as we were to avoid him. I hoped his reticence would continue when the police appeared.

"WHAT'LL we do?" demanded Gus helplessly.

"Separate!" snapped Bill curtly. "The police'll be looking for three fellows, and—"

I didn't hear the rest. We had separated.

Gus had shot across the street toward the corner and Bill had headed south. I turned north, but just then a policeman came scampering around the corner right in my path.

With rare presence of mind I flopped from the rôle of Paul Revere trying to catch the White Mountain express to that of a nonchalant citizen without a care in the world except to hold up a lamp-post.

"Hey, you!" demanded the policeman. "Did you see three tough-looking birds come out of this alley?"

I winced. Bill and I are inclined to be sensitive about our appearance. We may be a pair of old drifters, but we pride ourselves that at times we might pass for two bank presidents—perhaps not a very large bank, just a medium-sized one in a medium-sized town. Under the circumstances, however, I wasn't in the mood to argue the point about "tough-looking birds."

"Three tough-looking birds?" I tried to give the impression that I had started the old mental engine working on all its cylinders and was trying to look back over the vista of the years. This business of being an accessory after the fact in a bombing case didn't appeal to me at all, but it was too late to throw up the sponge. If Gus was hanged now, we would all hang—or be electrocuted; take your choice.

The policeman was impatiently fingering his hip pocket. I didn't like this officer at all. He was altogether too free with his gun. The memory of that neat little hole in the fence board made me squirm.

"Tough-looking birds?" I recalled at once the chap who had slunk back into the house across the street. He was so tough-looking that a cannibal housewife would have passed him up even if the jungle butcher were to give double coupons with him.

"Over there, officer." I pointed to the shabby house across the street. "I saw a tough-looking bird flutter in there. I guess he's one of the men you want. Better be careful, though. He looked like a guy who has been brought up on the idea that a brass button is a target's bull's-eye."

"They don't make 'em any too tough for me," chuckled the flatfoot confidently.

He strode across the street, his fingers twitching on the butt of the gun protruding from his pocket. That cop was a go-getter. He ought to have been in the real estate business in California.

I breathed a sigh of relief and started for the hobo camp over at the railroad tracks on the other side of the city. I figured that Bill would head for there. So far as Gus was concerned, I hoped he would head for some other place. The farther the better.

I APPROACHED the camp warily. My surmise proved correct. Bill was there. He was overjoyed to see me.

"Holy mackerel, Jim!" he ejaculated fervently. "I was afraid that by this time we would be rattling around in a careening Black Maria like an empty sardine can in an ash-sifter, *en route* for headquarters. Just think, two hours ago we were law-abiding drifters, without a care in the world. Look at us now! Fugitives from justice, fired upon by police officers, wanted as bombers, or at any rate as accessories after the fact. Holy mackerel! What a price to pay for a can of stew!" He feverishly mopped his brow.

"And that ain't the whole story," I sighed. "I sicked a police officer on an innocent man so as to throw him off our trail." I told him what had happened.

"That's bad stuff," declared Bill. "It's up to us to set things right for that poor devil. If they've got him locked up, we ought to help him to get out."

That's Bill all over—as earnest and persistent a wooer as ever Dame Trouble had. If somebody were to kidnap the old dame, Bill would stumble all over himself raising a ransom to get her out; and in default of a ransom he'd ferret her out anyhow, you may be sure.

Bill wanted me to go to the police station and stage a rescue act for the tough-looking guy; but the way I looked at it was that a second innocent man in the cooler wouldn't help the first innocent man. If we had anywhere near the kind of luck getting an innocent man out of the clutches of the police as we had had getting a guilty man out, I figured that we might as well be looking around for the chaplain, switch-thrower, mortician and other attendants for an official gala State event.

There was no use arguing with Bill, however, and when I flatly refused to meddle any further with the police, he stamped away from the clearing and headed up the road toward a distant farmhouse, with the avowed intention

of telephoning to the police and informing them that the tough-looking guy had done nothing wrong. My parting bit of advice to him was to hang up the receiver immediately after he had given the information so he could get at least some start on the posse that would head hotfoot for the farmhouse the instant the call was traced.

The sound of crackling twigs sent me plunging for the friendly shelter of a bush at the far edge of the hobo camp clearing.

A man emerged from the underbrush on the other side of the clearing. It was Gus! He was cautiously reconnoitering.

"Phew! I thought you were a policeman coming," I declared nervously.

Gus grinned good-naturedly.

"I was hoping you boys would be here," he said.

"Well, we're not going to be here long," I said curtly. "Bill will be back in a minute. Then we're going to beat it. We ain't palling around with bombers."

"Nobody's asking you to pal around with bombers," said Gus defensively. "I ain't no bomber, am I?"

"Oh, no, not at all," I replied sarcastically. "What do you suppose the police are so anxious to get hold of you for?"

Gus seemed surprised at the question. "Me?" he countered. "Nothing in particular, except they're always wanting me for one thing or another—trespassing, vagrancy and that sorta stuff—and I knew that if they found me in the neighborhood of a speakeasy which had been bombed, they'd grab me like a youngster grabbing a second helping of ice cream at a birthday party. In a pinch they'd hold me as a witness, though I didn't see nothing, didn't hear nothing and couldn't tell 'em nothing."

"You—you didn't bomb Costa's place?" I demanded incredulously.

"Of course not," Gus retorted indignantly. "Why should I bomb a place, especially with my last twenty cents lying on the counter and me not yet served with my drink? But I didn't want to be held as no witness."

GUS was busy fishing down in the crevice between two big rocks at the side of the clearing.

"It wouldn't have hurt you none to be held as a witness without making such a hullabaloo about it," I remarked coldly.

Just then Bill arrived, but Gus, still reaching into the rock crevice, had his back to him and didn't see him approaching.

"Yeh, and if I was held as a witness what would have become of the rest of this stew?" retorted Gus. From between the rocks he finally fished out a battered can. It was half full of stew. "The best stew I ever made," he remarked sociably, "and you boys can have some with me."

"Jim and I," interposed Bill with dignity, "are going into town and eat at a restaurant."

This announcement came as a surprise to me, because I knew that our last financial report had shown no assets—not even a collar-button.

"What did you do—sponge on the farmer for a dollar?" I demanded.

"We don't have to sponge on nobody," said Bill. "There's ten dollars waiting for us down at police station, the sergeant just informed me, as a reward for giving the officer the tip that led to the capture of Blanca, the racketeer who dynamited Costa's place."

THE END.

He slipped out without another look at that sheet-covered form

Voodoo'd

The black horror that has brooded over the old Juvenal manse in New Orleans swoops down in a sudden climactic attack that seems to spell the final doom of that ill-fated Creole family

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "The Gun Crusade," "The Mark of the Moccasin," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

BERTRAM JUVENAL was strangled and poisoned mysteriously in New Orleans while visiting his brother Amos, at the historic Juvenal manse. An overseer, Bouche, convicted of the crime, was shot dead in attempting to escape.

A young Creole aristocrat, Basil Boyean, underwent a gland operation for "three-day chills." He was uneasy over the possibility of having acquired characteristics of Bouche, the dead man from whom the gland extract had been taken.

Obsessed with the Juvenal case, Basil visited the manse, which had been converted into a boarding house, and, in a daze, spent the night there. The only other guest was Bertram's son, Lucien. The household consisted of Amos Juvenal, proprietor; his daughter, Ninon, and three Negro servants; Œdipe, the butler; Zozo, the maid, and Gumbo Lou, cook.

This story began in the Argosy for May 10.

That night Lucien was slain in the same way his father had been. The next day Detective Donnelly learned from the proprietor that a secret panel provided a passageway between Boyean's room and Lucien's. Bouche's finger-prints were found in Lucien's room!

Basil's mind was so confused that he did not know if he himself had committed the crime. Ninon accused him, but was unable to convince the police chief.

Lucien's brother, Jacques, was summoned to aid the investigation. That evening Jacques was alone with his cousin Ninon, when a mysterious hand reached through rotten woodwork and clawed at Jacques's neck, but did not kill him.

Indications pointed to Uncle Amos as the arch-fiend. Basil, believing himself guilty, defended Amos and promised to produce the murderer within a few hours, whereupon the police chief put him in charge of the case.

Œdipe had a perfect alibi for the Lucien murder, having been away all night, but investigation disclosed he was a voodoo priest and had conducted a voodoo meeting at that time.

Fearing that Jacques was destined to be the next victim, Basil persuaded him to spend the night in a hotel some distance from the ill-fated manse.

That midnight Basil and Donnelly broke up a voodoo meeting in the butler's room. In the excitement Uncle Amos was killed. Basil thought he himself was responsible, until he learned that he could not have done it; the old man had been killed with a sharp instrument. Thereupon the obsession was lifted from his mind.

The butler was locked up, but escaped. Then the cook was stabbed to death with an *apache* knife.

The problem of Bouche's finger-prints was solved by the discovery of the corpse's hand, amputated at the wrist, which was found on the premises of the manse. A *post-mortem* note written by Uncle Amos told of a secret underground passageway which the murderer must have used.

The fugitive shot and wounded a policeman guarding the entrance to that passageway, and escaped with Ninon. Boyean and the police set out in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DRAMATIC SURPRISE.

OFFICER MURPHY was left alone with the wounded policeman. He gave his charge as much first aid treatment as he was capable of administering, helped him to the cot in the butler's room, then hurried out with the intention of telephoning for an ambulance.

Murphy realized when he was crossing that dank, sinister garden that all the other patrolmen and detectives assigned to the case had joined the hunt. With the exception of Murphy himself, and the two guards posted in the empty lot in back of the house, the whole force had been drafted by Sergeant Leahy, who had taken them down Josephine Street to the river.

Officer Murphy did not relish the position in which he found himself. The garden seemed haunted by many forms. Shadows hovered among the palmettos and magnolias; the banana trees roosted like giant birds with half-folded wings; the adobe urns were like men crouching ready to spring upon him.

He hastened to the telephone, eager for the contact with the civilized world

it afforded. He was like a penitent who, fearing the wrath of unseen powers, hastens to the confessional.

After ordering the ambulance and a doctor, Murphy slipped out of the parlor again without daring to look over his shoulder at the sheet-covered form lying on the couch—the dead Gumbo Lou.

Once more in the patio, he hurried to the *porte-cochère* and out into the glare of the street lights, hoping to find one of his colleagues who might have remained on guard. But the street was empty. A cool, damp wind had come up from the Mississippi, heralding a remote gray streak of light across the river, which was dawn.

At that hour the façade of the Juvenal manse loomed ugly and mysterious. Officer Murphy could not resist the shudder that passed through his massive bones as he glanced up at those eye-like windows, those blackly etched galleries of filigreed iron like two webs hung across the decrepit walls.

But one of those windows poured out a shaft of yellow light.

To his amazement, the big Irishman saw a figure sitting there at a table, his head swathed in a towel and bent over in the attitude of reading.

"Hey, there, Jacques! Mr. Jacques! Come to the window. You hear me? Mr. Jacques!"

But there was no answer.

He hurried back into the patio, and on the way upstairs stopped once more to see how his patient was faring. Poking his head into the butler's room, he said:

"You all right, Mac? Be with you in a minute."

"Sure, I'm all right. But what were you yelling about?"

"I was callin' Jacques Juvenal. He's been up in his room readin' all this time. Had a towel wrapped 'round his forehead. Reckon he didn't hear nothin' all this time, the girl's scream, your gun fight, nothin'. Or else he's just locked himself up there, an' dassent come out. But—" he added in a perplexed tone, "I can't figure why he didn't answer me when I called up to his window just now from the street."

The wounded man smiled wanly.

"Ask me something harder!" he said. "*Jacques Juvenal is dead*—that is the answer! The butler's been trying to get him from the very start. Couldn't you figure that out? He must be sitting up there dead, same as the Negro woman. Get me a drink, Murphy, before you go up and crash in the door."

"Holy saints!" Officer Murphy groaned. "You can't sit down in a chair in this house without you croak!"

Thus ridden by a horde of well-founded fears, he went up to the gallery, approached the door of the dead man's room, knocked and pounded loudly, then started to crash his way in.

WHEN Donnelly, Boyean and the chief climbed down through the floor of the storeroom, they found themselves knee-deep in slimy ooze. Their flash lights showed a concrete culvert built many years before in the days when the New Orleans slave owners were taking every precaution against an uprising.

When the Mississippi River was at flood, the water seeped through the gateway under the levee and filled the culvert. At the present time, however, it was comparatively dry.

In fact, there were hummocks of dry mud all along the three hundred yards of culvert, on which the pursuers

could step without getting wet. And directly underneath the floor of the storeroom was a pile of broken cement slabs on which they might have landed if they had paused long enough to study the situation.

It was quite obvious that the fugitive had come and gone by way of this culvert without muddying his boots.

The three men advanced, running low-crouched and pausing just once to cast a hurried glance at the footprints with which the mud was covered.

"Here's the girl's prints," Donnelly said. "She was s t u m b l i n' along. Right here is where she fell down an' was dragged along. An' here," he cried triumphantly, "is the prints of the butler's shoes!"

All three men recalled as they ran that Œdipe had worn a peculiar pair of pumps, obviously made to order. One of them had a larger sole than the other—evidently to accommodate that coveted voodoo deformity, the six toes.

They kept running until the tunnel opened abruptly upon the pitch-dark expanse beneath the levee wharves. Here was a mass of piles and rotten lumber, jutting out of what seemed a solid carpet of rotten water hyacinths, floating casks, bagasse, and oil. A narrow causeway of open water showed where a small boat could have been steered in and hidden.

The men scrambled over the floating casks and lumber toward the outer side of the wharf. Here the gray light of dawn revealed the mile-wide breast of the Mississippi.

The h a r b o r master's powerful launch was alongside.

The chief revealed himself, and a voice from over the gunwale of the launch shot back, "We heard the chug of a motor somewheres along here, chief, as we was standin' downstream."

The chief and his companions hopped in before the launch had lost its steerageway, and the next moment they had swung out into the current.

From the darkness above came another voice: "Down the river, men! Downstream as fast as you can go! We seen a boat quarterin' across just as we got here."

The chief glanced up and saw along the wharf half a dozen of his men, who had come by way of the street.

The voice dwindled away as the launch and its occupants went bowling along.

AS they chugged in and out among the anchored freighters, the sky across the river sent up long bands of faint purple light. The shacks and sugar refineries and bagasse mills of Algiers swept by on their right; on their left the factories and wharves of the Crescent City swung past. Then came the long, interminable stretch of levees and the forests of moss-hung oak and slimy cypress.

"I see 'em!" a man at the prow cried. He started swinging the muzzle of the machine gun, aiming for a black speck half a mile away.

Dawn was at hand. The long bands of light turned from purple to pink, wheeling out from a central blood-red point across the cypress swamps. The pursuing launch swept on, leaving the freighters, stern wheelers, flatboats behind, following the wide bend where the river headed east once more, then heading south toward the delta. The black speck was now a tiny silhouette of a boat with two shadowy figures.

The oaks of Chalmette moved past them. The broad interminable expanse of the river turned crimson, and against this background they saw the figures more clearly now, a man stand-

ing in the stern, a woman sitting crouched low at his side.

"Give 'em a little whiff of that machine gun," the chief ordered. "But don't aim anywhere near 'em. We'll see where he thinks he's heading. He knows easy enough we'll catch him in another mile."

The machine gun sputtered out a fusillade, kicking up little flecks of light like spurting wounds all about the fleeing boat.

As the chief had expected, the fugitive realized the utter futility of attempting to race. He turned his wheel sharply and headed for the thickly wooded slopes of the levee on the eastern shore.

The harbor launch paid off toward the shore, quartering across the wide crimson expanse of water and winding in between two towheads. Both boats raced for the same point on the levee—where a veritable jungle of cypress, moss-hung oaks, and swamp grass reached far out into the water.

As they raced, the fugitive swung his prisoner up behind him, using her as a shield. The police launch gained. The fugitive crouched low and, glancing back at his pursuers, sent a fusillade of six shots in their direction.

The water spurted up ten yards before the prow, and as they gained on their quarry another fusillade came, the slugs whistling past their heads.

The fugitive boat ran at full speed into a quagmire of rushes, pyfeen grass and floating hyacinths. One more glance over his shoulder, another fusillade of shots, and the fugitive jumped overboard.

The pursuers caught sight of the piebald face—a brown blot flecked with black splotches.

Ninon's pale oval countenance was clearly revealed like a small golden disk against the deep green of the towhead banks.

"NOW let go at him!" the chief cried, as the criminal was for the first time bereft of the shielding body of the girl.

The machine gun sputtered out again; flecks of red water shot up from the mass of hyacinths, and twigs cracked.

The fugitive, stumbling waist deep through the quagmire and up to the solid ground, dropped his gun and fell. The police launch crashed in through the flotsam and grounded with a violent shiver upon the mud.

Half a dozen men sprang out into the water. The fugitive, lying wounded on a shell mound, turned once more, his mouth agape, his teeth gleaming like a cornered rat's. His brown speckled face was contorted into a hideous and malignant mask.

The chief and his men scrambled through the quagmire of lilies and flotsam, and scrambled up the bank.

But Basil headed off in another direction. He breasted his way through the entangling lilies and climbed aboard the small motor boat. Ninon was lying on the bottom boards in a swoon.

He picked her up in his arms and dashed water on her face. Her eyelids flickered, opened. She stared in a daze at her rescuer. Horror, resignation, amazement swept across her blood-drained face. Then a faint smile flickered at her lips.

"*Grâce à Dieu!*" she murmured. "It is you! I am in God's hands!"

Meanwhile, Donnelly, the first to get to firm ground, had made a dash for the murderer. The detective's eyes were focused sharply upon the man's hands, as he dived for the confidently

expected tussle before he could snap the handcuffs in place.

But there was no tussle. The murderer looked up at the circle of men closing in about him with guns drawn. He glared out of blazing wolf-like eyes at each face, and waited, grinning.

The chief advanced cautiously, but within a few yards of the prisoner he stopped dead still and gasped an oath.

He was looking at a brown, mud-streaked face—a face that had been cleverly painted to simulate the mottled dusky complexion of Œdipe, the butler. But this was not Œdipe!

A peculiar shudder went through the old chief's frame—like a chill. He was gazing upon a face which he knew he had seen but a short hour before—and yet for a few seconds he could not recognize it.

Then the truth came to him, as a long beam of sunlight slanted across the levee.

"Jacques Juvenal!" he cried voicelessly.

The handcuffs snapped shut with a triumphant click. Then Donnelly peered into the face of his prisoner. "Good God!" he thundered. "I thought—"

The detective did not finish. He sank back, sitting dumfounded in the thick crab grass, while the rest of the posse closed in. They stood in a circle.

And Jacques Juvenal stared up at them, his teeth gleaming through drawn, foam-flecked lips.

CHAPTER XXV.

A GHASTLY MASQUERADE.

THE prisoner was taken aboard the harbor master's launch. But the chief, Donnelly, Boyean and the girl returned to the city on the little motor boat in which Jacques had attempted to escape.

Ninon sat in the stern with Donnelly. The chief and Boyean sat up forward, so that when they spoke the girl could not hear them. Basil was not anxious to include her in the unraveling of these harrowing events. She was in no condition to take part in what was to follow.

As they were chugging up against the wide flood of sun-tinged water, the chief burst out suddenly:

"It can't be true! There's something wrong about the whole works."

"I confess there are a lot of angles to this orgy of murder that I cannot understand," Boyean said. "This fiend Jacques was in a hunting lodge. Seems to have been particularly careful to be far from the scene during one or two of these murders."

"Exactly. If he's the one to blame for the death of Lucien, how do you account for his being way off there in New Iberia at the time? That's a five-hour trip the fastest you can make it."

"I wish you would telegraph to New Iberia," Boyean suggested after a moment's thought, "and check up on that. It might help."

"Then there's this butler Œdipe. He had something to do with these crimes, or I'm way off in my guess."

Boyean shook his head definitely. "Every one of those murders was committed by Jacques. The butler may have been tangled up in them, yes. But it's my opinion that he had something on Jacques, as you would phrase it. Consider how this fiend Jacques was constantly protecting him. You remember he requested us not to be too hard on him for his voodoo activities. You remember the crisp new hundred-dollar bill we found in the old piebald's possession."

The chief nodded.

"None of us doubted but that it was from the roll of bills found that morning on the murdered Juvenal," Basil continued. "We had given this money to Jacques for safe-keeping. Then we find one of the bills in the butler's trunk. Therefore we must conclude that Jacques gave it to him. Furthermore, when we locked the butler up he escaped. How? There is no doubt in my mind but that Jacques liberated him. Now then, why is it that Jacques was so obviously under the Negro's thumb?"

"And let me ask something just as hard," the chief said. "Just where is that butler now?"

"If I thought he could answer any of these questions, I would suggest looking for him," Boyean said. "But I doubt if you will ever get any information out of that unlucky old duffer."

BASIL was right. They found out what had happened to Œdipe as soon as they arrived at the manse.

Jacques had already been taken into the manse where he was held in custody, pending an audition with the chief and Boyean.

The two latter arrived a few moments later in company with Donnelly and Mlle. Ninon. But when the girl found herself once more in front of the grim old manse, she clutched Basil's arm. Obviously she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Her eyes were wild, her lips ashen. When she spoke she could scarcely raise her voice above a terrified whisper.

"Please," she begged. "I cannot go in there, *m'sieu'*. I simply cannot."

"There is nothing more to fear, *mademoiselle*," Boyean assured her gently. "But to spare you any unnecessary pain I suggest that you go to a hotel. I'll see that your things are packed and sent after you."

The chief agreed to this. "I'll have one of the boys escort you to the St. Charles Hotel, ma'am," he said. "If we need you, we'll send for you. Meanwhile, I want to get the evidence together first. Mr. Boyean here says he has a lot of it."

After Mlle. Ninon had gone, the three men—the chief, Donnelly and Boyean—went into the *porte-cochère* of the old manse.

They were met immediately by Officer Murphy.

"Well, it's happened again, chief," Murphy said. "Another murder. I've lost count of 'em, but this was the neatest of all. Right in the heart—with another of them fancy knives."

"Who now? Where?" the other exclaimed, his face suddenly haggard with despair.

"Go up there to Juvenal's room an' have a look. I've left everything just as I found it. Ain't been near the place since."

Boyean and his two companions hurried up to the gallery, and to the crashed-in door of Juvenal's room.

A hideous sight met their gaze. The gaunt form of Œdipe, the butler, was propped up in a chair, his body leaning forward, so that his chest rested against the edge of the table. His elbows were doubled, resting on the table top, the hands supporting his inclined head.

From a distance he might have given the impression of reading. But as Boyean and his companion entered, they saw the face turned slightly toward them.

The sight of that face sent a thrill of horror through them. It was contorted in its final spasm of death, and

thickly encrusted with face powder. The head was bandaged in a towel, in mimicry of the ingenious devil Jacques, whom Boyean had seen in the room, attired in the same manner. In fact, Jacques had taken the butler's white jacket as an important part of his own disguise, and clothed the Negro in his tweed coat.

Œdipe was in his stocking feet, for Jacques had appropriated his boots, with the intention of leaving tracks in the mud of the culvert to confound the possible pursuit.

Through the ragged socks worn by the old butler, the chief and Boyean noticed that mark of his voodooistic priesthood—the deformity on his left foot—the sixth toe.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JACQUES'S ALIBIS.

THE final dénouement of the Juvenal tragedy took place at eleven o'clock that morning. The chief and Boyean had spent the intervening time in sending telegrams and checking up all available clews.

In front of the *porte-cochère,* a patrolman was holding back a motley crowd of longshoremen, roustabouts, river men and reporters. At Boyean's request, no one was admitted inside, except those who were indispensable to the grim work at hand: the chief, Donnelly, Boyean, and Jacques Juvenal, who was in the custody of two patrolmen.

"Bring this scoundrel here," Boyean said, as he stepped into the dim, sinister drawing-room with the chief.

Before they ushered in Jacques Juvenal, Boyean cleared the table of certain objects—sliding them into the drawer. They were knives, guns, bottles of poison. He did this as a precaution, fearing these implements of murder might be grabbed up by the prisoner.

It was then that Jacques was ushered in.

He was still clothed as they had found him on the levee, but his face was washed clean, so that once more his captors and accusers looked upon the handsome, the personable, the debonaire Jacques Juvenal.

Boyean noticed, however, that there was a very definite change about his eyes. They were brilliant, with a feverish and smoldering fire. They were horrible eyes. They were the windows, not of a soul—for he had none—but of an abnormally intelligent brain. They were also the eyes of a predatory beast.

The chief began the audience in a calm, decisive voice, totally devoid of bullying.

"Mr. Boyean has suggested to me that you might possibly like to make a statement before we take you to the station."

Jacques turned to Basil, bestowing a momentary smile upon him. His answer served to show with what consummate mastery he had played every card in his game.

"If I thought there was anything really serious about this farce," he said, "I mean this farce of putting me in manacles and bringing me back here in the custody of these two patrolmen—I would not offer any statement. I would make use of my rights and keep silent until the proper time. But you men seem to be honestly confused in your convictions. They are fallacious convictions, but sincere... I killed Œdipe, the butler, and dragged my cousin Ninon out to a boat and attempted to escape with her!"

The three listeners stared. They were astounded at the matter-of-fact manner in which this slippery criminal uttered such a self-damning statement.

"But is it possible—" the chief began; then, catching Boyean's eye, he checked himself. "Go on, please. What else?"

"Œdipe was a voodoo *papaloi*. He was weaving his spells about this whole household. The house was doomed. The very air was putrefying with his hideous witchcraft. He had a congregation of disciples out there on the levee, chanting their devil songs. You all heard it. I heard it—and it terrified me. Ninon was terrified, crazed. But in her state of mind she did not know just whom to fear. She feared even me. I wanted to save her. I had to drag her away. I knew that these voodoo devils who were working for Œdipe would come after me as soon as I got to the mouth of the culvert to my boat. They were all around out there—hiding in hogsheads, in the rush swamps, in the mud like Calibans, and in warehouses performing rites over their dead pigs."

Jacques, who had been talking rapidly, paused to get his breath.

"I lit upon the trick of making myself up as Œdipe," he continued. "I wanted them to think I was back there in the house—so I made it seem that Œdipe was myself in the room up yonder. Then I fled. But when I was pursued by you gentlemen, I thought my plans had failed. In the early dawn I could not tell whether you were black or white. I continued to flee—"

HE stopped suddenly, his lips tightening into a triumphant grin. "I believe I have explained, *messieurs*," he added, shrugging his shoulders and dropping into a chair.

Donnelly and the chief looked over to Boyean. Bafflement, perplexity, and a growing irritation clouded their faces.

"Looks to me Mr. Boyean, as if you've pulled a good boner," the chief remarked. "It's almost as good as the first boner we pulled in this case when we convicted Bouche."

Boyean matched his own urbanity against Jacques's by lighting a cigarette and exhaling it in a thin cloud toward the darkness of the ceiling.

"Your choice of a time to commit this pogrom, M'sieu' Juvenal," he said calmly, "was most propitious. It has served quite effectually, you notice, in pulling the wool over the eyes of these gentlemen of the law. It was doubtless very easy for you to find out through these ill-fated household servants who adored you, just when there was to be another secret voodoo meeting. Naturally, the police and the district attorney's office and the public and the press will blame the voodoo rites. It is spectacular. It appeals to all our imaginations."

Basil was gazing directly at the suspect as he continued to talk.

"Nevertheless, one man committed these crimes. The voodooists did not. Œdipe was making a simple and childlike attempt to use his vast store of voodoo superstition to protect this house. The house had a devil in it. That we all agree. Œdipe knew it. He tried to exorcise it. The dead pigs you mention could be a part of voodoo ritual. But you yourself killed those pigs. You needed them in your own machinations, Monsieur Jacques, if I am not very much mistaken."

"Then you are accusing me of murdering pigs?" Jacques laughed. "Quite an interesting bit of logic, M'sieu' Boyean."

The chief got up with an oath. "What the devil has this stuff about pigs got to do with the case, Mr. Boyean? I don't care who killed pigs. It's who killed Bertram Juvenal, and his son Lucien and—"

Jacques waved his cigarette in protest.

"Don't force him to come out with such an accusation, sir. I hardly think M'sieu' Boyean will accuse me of killing my own father—and my own brother."

"No, I do not accuse you of such crimes, *m'sieu'*. But you killed both of those men, nevertheless. In a word, I have had reason to suspect for some time that *Bertram Juvenal was not your father!*"

Jacques leaped to his feet, clenching his manacled hands. His face was white. His lips were moving in suppressed fury.

"I have tried to comport myself as a gentleman under your insane accusations!" he cried out. "But this has gone too far. Do you, sir," he turned to the chief, "expect me to repress my anger when I am dealing with a dog and a liar?"

"One moment, Mr. Juvenal," the chief said, stepping between the two. "I shall ask Mr. Boyean to explain any remarks like that."

"I shall explain, *messieurs*."

BASIL got up and went to the table where there was a plush album. He opened it immediately.

"I recall how you spent some little time studying this particular photograph, M'sieu' Juvenal," he said. "And I have put myself in your place and studied it many times since."

Basil passed the album over to the chief, asking him to look at it. It contained a picture of Bertram Juvenal, his wife, and a dashing young Frenchman whose eyes were gazing fondly into the eyes of the young girl beside him.

"Do you notice a resemblance between this young man and Jacques? Do you notice the Gascon cheekbones, the handsome eyes, the debonair mien?"

"It is a vile insult!" Jacques cried. "If you are attempting to prove my guilt by any such lunacy—any such rotten insinuations—"

"I wish to say, *m'sieu'*," Boyean retorted quietly, "that I shall utter no word against your mother's history or character. Any villainy that you possess has come to you from your father, who was an *apache!*"

"Do you think a jury would believe such a thing against our noble Juvenal blood?" Jacques shouted.

"Not without further proof, perhaps," Boyean admitted. "As a matter of fact, I myself did not notice it until I heard of that quarrel between your mother and her husband, Bertram Juvenal, on one of their visits here. Then, perhaps, I might remind you of the message of Amos Juvenal—stating that Bertram had a rival, his wife's lover. Furthermore, there was some talk about the fact that with her rare type of beauty and personality she became a favorite among the *Nervi*, the *apaches* of Marseilles. Bertram Juvenal met her in some cabaret in Marseilles. Perhaps you will deny that?"

"I shall enter into no vilification of her name," Jacques said hotly. He glanced surreptitiously at the chief and Donnelly. Both policemen were obviously on his side in this particular skirmish. "I can only say that when this affair is settled to the satisfaction of the police, you will give me personal satisfaction for your words likewise, *m'sieu'*."

Basil made a slight bow. Then, closing the book, he returned to his chair and lit another cigarette.

"Last night," he went on, "I sent to my home for a certain book—a book on the *apaches* and their methods. I remember a chapter that dealt with their weapons, one of which was the *lingue*."

He reached out to the table drawer and picked up the curious antique with which Gumbo Lou had been murdered.

"This is a *lingue*," Basil said. "A very good specimen. Another chapter of the same book deals with *apache* poisons. I have checked it up this morning. One of their favorite poisons resembles somewhat the combination used in the claw marks in these murders: that is to say, an alkaloid of the veratrine group. A man who had an *apache* father might know the secret of it. But an old Negro butler of Louisiana, on the other hand—"

"Very well," Jacques said, without, however, giving any semblance of making an admission. "We have already suspected that an *apache* might have committed these crimes."

"An *apache's* son," Basil corrected.

"Better drop that side of it, Mr. Boyean," the chief advised. "I can't see that it's important—nor even possible."

"Thank you, *m'sieu'*," Jacques put in.

"IT is important," Basil objected, "for the simple reason that it brings to light the only possible motive for any of these crimes. It was a carefully guarded family skeleton. Bertram Juvenal, of course, would never make it public. His fortune, following the directions of the grandfather's will, was left to the two sons, Lucien and this handsome and popular gentleman before us."

Basil nodded toward Jacques, who had turned his back with the gasp of a martyr.

"But as for Lucien," the speaker went on, "if he ever came into possession of the knowledge of his brother's illegitimacy, he could very easily have broken the will. So he was killed before such knowledge came to him. As for Uncle Amos there is a possibility that he was beginning to suspect the truth. You remember that Amos wanted his daughter to marry Lucien—not this gentleman whom she adored. It would have been easy for him to persuade her to marry this precious hero—but instead, he ordered her on pain of banishment from the family, to marry the detested Lucien."

Basil looked for a moment into the faces of the chief and Donnelly and saw they were not convinced. He nodded, as if retiring into a reverie and speaking only to himself. "Yes, I am convinced that Uncle Amos must have harbored a doubt."

"I would have killed him if he had put it into words," Jacques burst out.

"Don't know as I blame you," Donnelly said, chewing at his cigar.

"If that is your whole case, Mr. Boyean, I think we might as well call a halt," the chief added. "I don't like keeping Mr. Juvenal here in manacles any longer, giving him a third degree."

"You are very considerate, sir," Jacques said graciously. "But if this young busybody has any more insults to offer, I would just as soon listen to them here and now."

He was standing on one side of the table glowering across at his accuser, his head inclined, giving him a taut, deadly look.

"I am told that I am an illegitimate son. I am told that I am a murderer. I am told that I am an *apache*."

"An *apache's* son," Basil corrected for the second time. "And one more accusation, *m'sieu'*, that you might find just as hard to swallow: You started this hideous plot to wipe out the Juvenal family when you were probably little more than a boy. You gave rare antiques to the servants of the household and others. When you were a boy, I understand your father gave you no money. And if so, how could you purchase antiques to scatter about with such prodigality? And where could you purchase them?"

"In a Baltimore secondhand store," Jacques snapped.

The chief looked at him, detecting the first suggestion of a certain attitude —the attitude of defense.

"Would all gifts of a Baltimore secondhand store be antiques of a certain definite stamp?" Basil asked.

"What stamp?"

"Antiques from Morocco—that's the stamp. A barbaric opal brooch worn by Ninon. The snuffbox of Œdipe. The pendant of Gumbo Lou. They could all be found in a Marseilles pawn shop."

"An extraordinary deduction," Jacques laughed.

"*Monsieur*, these were all given to you by a Marseilles *apache!*"

"ASIDE from mentioning antiques and dead pigs," Jacques said laconically, "I wonder if there is any remote chance of your telling me just why I am under arrest?"

"The one point I have made is this," Basil answered, without being ruffled in the slightest. "We have the motive for your fiendish and despicable work. You are not Bertram Juvenal's son. Hence it was necessary to kill him and to kill your half-brother Lucien. Then the fortune would go to you, provided no one knew of your illegitimacy. But, as I said, your Uncle Amos may have known. And if he could have proved it, he could have got your fortune from you. So you killed him likewise."

Again the color left Jacques's face. He turned gray. He was a Mephistopheles carved in stone. The chief saw his face and it was the second proof that the suave Juvenal was on the defensive.

The chief stepped to the door and whispered to the patrolman posted there: "Keep a sharp lookout from now on. I'm beginning to see that we're dealing with a cornered rat."

When he came back the chief's face betrayed no emotion. He was serious, thoughtful. "Mr. Juvenal," he said. "I wish you would let us get to the bottom of this. I want to be shown that these suspicions are unfounded. I'd like to ask Mr. Boyean a few questions in your defense."

Jacques nodded somewhat suspiciously, then shrugged his shoulders. "Thank you, *m'sieu'*."

The chief turned to Basil. "Lucien Juvenal," he began, "may have died from the strychnine poisoning, but added to that, there were claw marks on his throat. There was blood in the marks—showing that they could not have been made upon a corpse. They could not have been added after he was dead, because a corpse doesn't bleed. So we can't get around the fact that the murderer was there at the scene of his death."

He paused and looked at Jacques, who was smiling quizzically.

"The medical examiner said Lucien died at about ten or eleven o'clock," the chief went on. "Now then, I wired New Iberia this morning, and have the depositions of four different reputable witnesses that Jacques Juvenal was

seen in the vicinity of New Iberia at that time—in the street, in a hotel lobby, and in the duck-hunting lodge, kept by a Cajan guide. Now, Mr. Boyean, can you tell me how he could have killed Lucien Juvenal at ten and at the same time showed himself in New Iberia—a five-hour motor ride at top speed from New Orleans?"

Donnelly stood with thumbs in his vest, puffing his cigar stub excitedly. "It's clear enough to me, chief, that Mr. Boyean has gone too far accusin' Mr. Jack of these crimes."

Jacques favored both bluecoats with a dramatic bow. "The defense rests," he said mockingly. Then, turning to Basil: "What more has the prosecution to say?"

"Just this," Basil shot back readily. "I would like to tell you just how you killed your half-brother Lucien."

"It would be most entertaining," Jacques rejoined.

"First, I assume that you had some knowledge of the construction of the manse. Probably your mother knew it, having gained the secrets from her husband, Bertram Juvenal. Next, I will assume that on one of your boyhood visits to the manse you got your hands on the keys of the house, made sketches of them, perhaps, had duplicates made."

"I THOUGHT you were going to tell me how I murdered Lucien while I was in New Iberia?" Jacques said sarcastically.

"The night of the murder the family is at dinner," Basil conjectured. "You gain admission to his room and put strychnine into his bottle of port, knowing by your brother's habits that he would take a drink of it before bed. At ten or eleven o'clock, as the medical examiner reports, Lucien dies in convulsions. And thus we found him in death, lying in a grotesque and convulsed position on his bed."

"And the claw marks?" Jacques reminded his accuser with a confident smile.

Basil did not heed the interruption. "At the time of Lucien's death you are seen in New Iberia, a five hours' journey away. You immediately return to the manse, arriving here about four in the morning. Then you administer the claw marks upon the corpse!"

"Blood from a corpse?"

"You had already obtained some blood which was so nearly identical with human blood that the medical examiner confused it—the blood of pigs."

"The pigs that were found on the levee?" Donnelly gasped. "You mean them pigs with the sliced throats?"

"Exactly. And they were left on the levee purposely so that the police would attribute them to the voodoo rites. A very clever and convenient way of disposing of bodies, particularly since it threw the limelight on the voodoo meetings."

"I'll be damned!" Donnelly cried.

Jacques Juvenal was able to fumble for cigarettes, despite his manacled hands. He lit one and began to puff fiercely.

Basil hastened on. "Now, then, the finishing touches to this crime: On your second visit to the murder room at dawn, you proceed to set the stage. You remove the poisoned bottle of port. You muss the room, giving it the appearance of having been the scene of a mortal combat. In doing this you come across the telegram which Lucien had been writing while his poison was at work. The telegram was addressed to you yourself. Now you estimate that this telegram, inasmuch as

it would show the investigators that you were supposed to be in New Iberia, is a valuable document. You do not destroy it. Instead, you hide it, where it would be very speedily found: under the mattress of the bed in the next room."

Jacques's reaction was peculiar. He showed no trace of anger, but his perfect equanimity seemed more dangerous than anger. It was abysmal, murderous. It suggested the power of a pent-up volcano.

"I must commend you on your imagination, *m'sieu'*," he said, smiling at Basil. "I understand now why you have had such success as a writer of articles on crime. I would suggest, however, that you turn your hand to fiction. You have a marvelous gift."

The accused man looked over to the chief and saw that a change had come over the latter's face. To avoid his eyes, Jacques glanced at the more gullible Donnelly. "M'sieu' Boyean has shown us how it could have been done. Very well, take me to jail if you have a single proof that it *was* done as he says."

"IT was the butler that did it," Donnelly announced with complete conviction. "He attackt-ed Mr. Jack, didn't he, up in that room across the patio? He clawed him up, didn't he? The girl was there. She seen a hand in the dark, didn't she?"

"Yes," Basil admitted. "The hand was a dead hand, manipulated with a stiff wire, perhaps—a common trick of fake spiritualists. There is evidence of that in the mutilated hand of Bouche which has come into our possession. But you, *m'sieu'*," he said to Jacques, "attacked yourself!"

"Oh, for the love of Mike!" Donnelly snorted.

"You rolled on the floor while Mlle. Ninon was screaming for help. You scratched your neck—quite superficially, I have no doubt. And then you smeared blood—the pig's blood again—over yourself."

"But the Negro butler was seen up there at the hole in the wall," Donnelly put in.

"The Negro butler," Jacques scoffed, "seems to be immune to this fictionist's suspicions. But as a matter of personal inquisitiveness, I would like to know what that voodoo doctor was doing up there at the time."

"Hunting for hornets," Basil answered. "I examined the hole this morning and found a hornets' nest. He wanted them for his rites."

Jacques laughed. "Perhaps Mlle. Ninon will have something to say about that scene. I dare say a jury would take her version above yours."

"I dare say," Basil replied. "Only let me remind you gentlemen that Mlle. Ninon avoided this precious and romantic half-cousin of hers after that scene. And we jumped at the conclusion, fostered very carefully by this superb Mephistopheles"—nodding to Jacques—"that the girl might have attacked him herself. The estrangement between the two seemed to be due not to the girl's fear of Jacques, but to his fear of her."

Jacques turned to the chief with a sudden imploring gesture of his hands. "You will remember, *m'sieu'*, that my cousin begged you to keep me out of the house on the following night. Does that show she feared me or was apprehensive for my safety? I ask you, *m'sieu'*."

It was Boyean who answered.

"She was apprehensive for herself and for the others in this house. She was not yet sure, perhaps, that you

were such a bloodthirsty scoundrel. Nevertheless, she was thoroughly afraid of you. And for that reason she wanted you kept out of the house after dark."

The chief sat down. His brows were deeply furrowed. His fingers nervously tapped the table.

"This man Uncle Amos is another one of the victims that's mixing me up," the chief said. "He was brained out there in the patio, while Jacques Juvenal was in his hotel at the time—half an hour's fast ride away. If you will explain that—"

"Yes, *if* he explains that!" Jacques laughed.

The murderer turned his back, pacing the room, puffing madly at a fresh cigarette. Evidently he had some inward fear that even this—the most iron-clad of all of his alibis—might break under Boyean's uncanny analysis.

Donnelly put in his word first. "Yes, explain that. Mr. Jack phoned from the Ferdinand Street hotel, sayin' he was comin' down. I told him not to. Then when his uncle gets brained I phone out to tell him about it. An' the woman answerin' the phone said he'd just left. Now, how the Sam Hill do you figure he was down in this here patio, if he'd left a few minutes ago from Ferdinand Street at the other end of town?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HAUNTED PATIO.

JACQUES was laughing softly to himself. A dry, sinister chuckle. "For the mere sport of it, I'll make a wager," he said. "Let our gifted romancer reconstruct that crime. Then I will plead guilty. Is it a fair wager?"

"Quite fair," Basil agreed. And he was echoed by both the chief and Donnelly. The latter even observed, "I figure that's a pretty good sportin' proposition."

Boyean went to the door. "Will you show that fellow Bleakins in?" he said to one of the patrolmen.

"Who the devil's Bleakins?" Jacques asked, slightly nettled.

"Just one of the numerous population of New Orleans who has read the extras this morning that came out shortly after your astounding ramble down the river," Boyean said. "He reported here with some news. I have never seen him before. Nor has M'sieu' the Inspector. But he is a link in the chain. The woman M'sieu' Donnelly mentions—the proprietor of your little hotel—is also a link. I telephoned to her last night. It was while you were occupied in murdering Gumbo Lou!"

"Am I actually accused of that murder likewise?" Jacques burst out in well-feigned astonishment.

"I thought he was upstairs in his room," Donnelly pointed out.

"It was a simple matter for Jacques Juvenal to descend the front staircase to the vestibule, unlock the door which led to this room, and hide behind that *portière*. The Negress was sitting within easy reach, and you sent your *apache lingue* home in truly professional fashion. In fact, she uttered merely a groan. I was actually in the room when it happened, and I heard the groan, which I considered merely a symptom of her mental agony."

"I thought we were talking about the telephone conversation with the hotel woman," the chief interrupted.

"Exactly. The woman told me that she had not seen Jacques leave—although she was certain of it. For she had heard him start his car and back

it out of the garage not ten minutes before. She said M'sieu' Jacques had even warned her last night, when he engaged his room, that he might leave at any time during the night, and not to worry if she heard him backing his car out."

"Yes, of course I told her that," Jacques said lightly. "Why not?"

"But it was not you, M'sieu' Jacques, who backed the car out!"

"You lie!" the other retorted.

The chief got up from his chair. He went to the door, evidently sensing the fact that the coming scene would be the critical one.

A stranger was escorted in—an ugly little runt with huge black fingernails, greasy hands, oil-stained clothes. His name was Bleakins.

"Perhaps you do not know this man?" Boyean inquired, looking up at Jacques, who was glaring out of bloodshot eyes.

"No, I do not!" the latter rasped.

"Perhaps you, Mr. Bleakins, do not recognize *him?*"

THE runt looked about—at the chief inspector, at Donnelly, and at the patrolman who had just ushered him in. He seemed badly frightened.

"No, I don't recognize nobody," he said. "I don't even recognize this gent's voice." He pointed a thick tortoise-shell thumb at Jacques. "All I can say is that some one phoned me last night at the garage I work at, an' asked if I could go out to an address on Ferdinand Street an' get a car which needed a new battery. I was told to bring the car back to my garage, an' it would be called for at half past twelve."

"And you complied?" Boyean asked.

"No, sir. Not right away. I said I couldn't make no midnight calls that way. But the man on the phone offered me ten bucks if I'd get out there good an' quick. So I said yes. An' he says I'd find the car in a two-car garage behind the little hotel, with a key into it. An' all I'd have to do would be to change the battery, back it out of the garage, an' bring it down town. Seemed all right to me, an' I done it. Then this mornin' when I read the papers I got scared. I seen the number on the car an' all, an' figured I was a tool maybe in a kind of plot."

"You figured right," the chief inspector said.

"But look here," Donnelly objected. "Mr. Jacques telephoned to me from the Ferdinand Street place himself. At least—"

He rubbed his chin sheepishly. He was beginning to see the light.

"You might conceive of the possibility, M'sieu' Donnelly, that he telephoned from just around the corner?" Boyean remarked.

"It's a lie!" Jacques screamed. "Every word you've been speaking is a damn' lie!"

He seemed to be convulsed with a fury which he had tried desperately to keep in check. And now the pent-up volcano belched out. Fairly howling oaths at Boyean and at the runty garage man, he rushed across the room, whipping up a chair with his manacled hands as he came.

He brought the chair crashing upon the luckless garage man, knocking him senseless. Next he swung both fists upward under Boyean's chin.

The latter ducked and caught his assailant with a neat uppercut in which there was enough strength to fell an ordinary man.

But Jacques had turned into a

maniac, fighting with superhuman power. He merely staggered with the impact of the blow, then lunged forward.

With one of his manacled hands he clutched Boyean's throat, the fingers digging in like claws. And even while the policemen rushed from every direction, hurling themselves upon the murderer, the fingers dug in, locking themselves like a steel trap.

The room went black for Boyean as he sagged to his knees.

WHEN Basil Boyean came out of those abysmal depths of unconsciousness, he found himself looking up into a dimly outlined oval of light. It was the face of a beautiful woman.

"You are all right now, *monsieur?*" a voice was saying. It was her voice—Mlle. Ninon's. "Can you sip this wine? There—that is better. Your eyes are open. They are looking at me."

He felt something soothing upon his throat.

"Let me wash this again, *monsieur.* There! The pain is going away?"

"Yes. It has gone away," Basil whispered. Then his brows contracted. He was desperately muddled. He was on the floor of the Juvenal drawing-room. But if that were true, why was the girl bending over him? He thought she had fled to a hotel. Finally he asked:

"It is you—*mademoiselle!* But why—why are you here?"

"I came back, *monsieur.* I was afraid."

"I thought it was of this house that you were afraid."

"Yes, but I was more afraid for your life. That fiend swore to me—while we were in the boat—that he would come back to kill one more, even if he went to the gallows. He said you knew too much to be left among the living. Then when you returned to this house with all these men, I feared he would spin more of his witchcraft and his lies, and make them all think he was innocent."

"You don't know how near he came to that," Basil said. He struggled up, sitting there on the floor, gazing about in a bewildered sort of ecstasy. Then he clung to her suddenly.

"Where is Jacques now?"

"Just now they have taken him away," she answered with a shudder.

Basil knew how every cell in her body writhed at the thought of coming into that house. But she had come. "You came to save me, *mademoiselle!*"

"It is you who saved me, *monsieur.* If I can ever atone for the suspicions I held against you—"

For a moment Basil looked into her face. Then he was conscious that several others were in the room. Beyond the door he could see the patio which was haunted by many people. They moved about among the palmettos and oleanders like restive ghosts.

It seemed to Basil to be a spot where only ghosts could abide. The living did not belong there. It was a habitation for the murdered Juvenals—Bertram and his son Lucien, and his brother Amos, and for the old servant Gumbo Lou, and for the ill-starred voodoo *papaloi,* Œdipe. It would be a place to which the spirit of Jacques Juvenal would return after he was hanged.

Basil shuddered as if a chill had gripped him. "Let me take you from this house, Ninon!" he said.

"Take me, Basil. I want to go—with you!"

THE END.

"I'd give anything to see him comin' up with a load of ammo"

Ol' Missoura

That stubborn malcontent couldn't drill and wouldn't obey, so they made him ammunition carrier—but how they prayed for Ol' Missoura when the Germans charged their trench!

By JOSEPH KNOX STONE

CAPTAIN LYONS spoke grimly to the top sergeant.

"Devil of a position for a company commander his first time under fire. But we'll have to stick."

He was right. Our machine gun company of the —th Infantry had stepped off at dawn, following our first battalion. Our job was to hold the ground they gained, not to assist in the attack itself, but twice during the day the first battalion had been held up and our captain had set up the guns and combed the field with fire.

At three in the afternoon our objective had been gained—the crest of a small rise. Right along the top ran a German trench, and from it we could see down the slope in front. God pity the counter-attack that would cross that space under our fire. But—there always is a "but" in war—we were almost out of ammunition!

For my gun I had only a hundred rounds. I knew. I had counted them ten times. Three runners had been sent back with urgent messages, but no word had come up to us.

"There's a Boche sniper somewhere who has that ground behind us covered," the top sergeant told the captain. "He got those runners. Can you see anything ahead of us, sir?"

"They're getting ready to counter-attack," said the captain. "Have the men each pick up a rifle. When the machines run out of ammo, use pistols, then the bayonet. And pass the word along not to fire till ordered." The corners of Captain Lyons's mouth

twitched. "Where the hell are those aviators? They're supposed to fly over us every once in a while to relay our signals back. I haven't seen one to-day!"

The top sergeant scanned the sky, spat. "I'd give my chance of heaven to see Ol' Missoura comin' up back there with a load of ammo."

OL' MISSOURA was a sleepy-eyed individual who had been detailed to us shortly after the company was organized. He had been promptly nicknamed and the name stuck. Even the officers relaxed and called him by it.

He had naturally gravitated to the post of ammunition carrier; and he made a good one. Husky, strong as a horse, willing, always cheerful. Too darn cheerful, sometimes, especially in the mornings. He had an infernal habit of singing early in the morning and Ol' Missoura was no Caruso. Nobody cared for his voice. The captain spoke to me one time about him.

"Look here— Ol' Missoura is in your section. Keep him quiet in the mornings. The jackass wakes all the men up, long before first call."

Usually we men could handle a case of that kind ourselves. For instance we broke Martin, a big first squad man, of snoring. Two nights of mixing pepper with his air intake cured him. But most of the men were afraid of Ol' Missoura. He never said a word back to any one who criticized him to his face, but let them get fresh behind his back . . . Several who tried it found out they had made a bad mistake. He wasn't so big, either—not nearly as tall as some of those on whom he left his mark. He packed a real wallop!

So some of the fellows had it in for him. There was another thing. When we went to go aboard the transport, Ol' Missoura disgraced us. Every one in the company was glad he was at last getting across—at least pretended he was. Every one but Ol' Missoura, that is. He did not want to go. The rest of the company gathered around, even accused him of being "yellow" and afraid of the submarines: anything insulting they could think of, trying to shame him. It was no use. So we huddled close around him—we were ashamed that a member of our company would act like that—and finally by main strength got him aboard, fighting to the last.

I don't honestly believe Ol' Missoura was a coward. You see, out where he was raised there are no large bodies of water. He just had a dread of the ocean and of ships. As for being afraid of submarines or of Germans, I don't believe he ever thought of them.

YES, sir! The top was right. It sure would have looked good to see Ol' Missoura comin' up with a load of cartridges. An enemy plane, flying so low that we could see the heads of the pilot and observer, came along. It went on past, right above our heads, following our line. Captain Lyons looked worried.

"Now we'll catch it," he said. "That guy 'll wireless back our position and their artillery will open up. Tell the men they can smoke and can break out their emergency rations. They'll feel better then—won't be so nervous."

Believe me, I sure was plenty nervous. I was hungry as a wolf, but when I opened up my rations I couldn't eat a bite. I put the stuff in my mouth and chewed it, but I couldn't swallow, my mouth was so dry. I got out a rag and gave Betsy—that's my gun—a good cleaning up. I was bound she

wasn't goin' to jam on me before I fired all the shots I had left. Working helped my nerves. Then when I dug up from the bottom of my gas mask—where it had no business to be—a cigarette, after six drags I felt O. K.

Now I was sure we'd get through some way or another. I knew that if it was possible Ol' Missoura would get that ammo up to us. He was such a darn stubborn cuss. I remembered, once the top sergeant had sworn at him steady for nearly half an hour about that singing in the morning. Ol' Missoura never batted an eye, never answered a word, just stood there, meek as Moses. And the next morning, the usual song. No, you couldn't change Ol' Missoura's mind for him. If he started with ammunition, he'd come through.

I saw a loose rifle and picked it up. There were three shells in the magazine. I slipped them into the loops of Betsy's belt. A hundred and three I had now. I counted them. Seven shots in my automatic pistol. Then I had a bayonet—and when it went blooey I wouldn't need to worry any more, ever.

Then hell broke loose! Shells roared over us, burst behind us in huge clouds of smoke and dust. Machine gun bullets snapped and cracked a scant half foot over our heads.

"Box barrage!" yelled the captain to the sergeant. "Cutting off our retreat and keeping help from getting to us. Not dumping any right on us. Don't want to ruin this trench. They want it intact. The nerve of that! Say, look at them!"

I stuck my head up. I could see them, all right. They were advancing at a steady walk. After a while I saw a whole slew of them, gathering for a charge. My nerves were not so good, again. I didn't have much time to think, for Captain Lyons beckoned me.

"After you've fired your last shot and before they get here," he directed, "try to get back with word to regimental headquarters. Better look the ground over now, figure out the line you intend to take."

I turned to obey. A yell came from the men. Two hundred and fifty yards away the Germans were coming. Not spread out in any open formation either—a solid line of them, like a solid wall of gray water! They must have known we were short of ammunition, to charge in the open all bunched up like that. Probably they guessed why those runners had been sent back!

WE cut loose with what we had, but in a few seconds every machine gun was silent. The men pulled their pistols out of their holsters. I'll say this: not a man of the company looked as if he even thought of running.

They fingered their bayonets nervously. The fire of the enemy machine guns let up. Their troops were so close to us that their guns had to cease for fear of hitting their own men. But it was still bad, out back. I climbed out of the trench.

"For Pete's sake, look!" I yelled, pointing back.

Coming up, all alone, was that darn, no-'count, mean, low-down, ornery, blessed Ol' Missoura, two big sacks of ammunition on his back. We took off our tin hats and yelled.

"Come on, Ol' Missoura!"

"Come on, you yellow-bellied cuss!"

"Come on, Ol' Missoura, atta boy!"

It seemed as if he heard us through all that fiendish din for he stepped out a little faster. I heard the captain talking, yelling, to himself:

"He'll never make it! They'll get him sure! He won't be in time anyhow!"

The enemy on our flanks realized and cut loose. Ol' Missoura speeded up a little more. The bullets were kicking up the dirt around him. Twice he reeled. We learned afterward that he had been hit—hard.

A shell burst near him. The smoke hid him. Our hearts stopped beating. Was he down? The smoke thinned. He was still on his feet. He kept on coming, staggering a little, game, only fifty feet away!

I stole a glance at the Germans, wondering what they thought of us, standing up out of our trench, yelling like Fiji Islanders.

The man next me, the most irreligious man in the outfit was talking out loud, praying.

"Dear God!" he said, over and over, "Dear God! Let Ol' Missoura git through with them ca'tridges! Please, God, please! Dear God, if you do I'll—I'll go to church at the Y every Sunday!"

He meant it, too.

Ol' Missoura was only thirty feet away now. Twenty. A bullet hit his knee! He almost went down. Recovered! Limped a few more steps and fell, his legs paralyzed, a scant ten feet from the trench.

He raised his head and above the din of the battle, bravely, challengingly, rang the opening notes of the song which used to wake us in the dawn back in camp.

WE gunners jumped to our guns while the other men swarmed out to Ol' Missoura, ripped open the bags, threw the belts of cartridges to us. Fingers fairly flying, we fed the belts into the maws of the guns, yanked the muzzles into position, caught that advancing gray line over the sights, and then, oh, boy! That *rat-a-tat-tat* was the sweetest song ever sung!

Talk about the Germans being only sixty miles from Paris when the Marines stopped them! Boy, howdy, they were less than sixty *feet* from us when we busted loose! That's the closest they did get. It was like turning a fire hose on a pile of leaves. The whole bunch went down.

We peppered the woods a little, but they were through, what I mean. Then our artillery opened up and drove them clear out from in front of us. They had expected to catch us napping and instead, thanks to Ol' Missoura, they caught hell.

When the firing ceased and our wounded were all attended to, we climbed out of the trench to where Ol' Missoura was lying. The top sergeant stooped over him. That tough old hard-boiled bird of a regular army sergeant straightened up with tears in his eyes. He wasn't ashamed of them either. He had lots of company in his tears.

We buried Ol' Missoura there. As we started to fill in the grave, I took out the little silk flag I always carried, so Ol' Missoura was buried with full military honors.

Of course, we had no chaplain, but as we turned away, the sergeant, growling to hide the emotion in his voice, spoke up:

"A couple of you birds make a cross for Ol' Missoura. He was a damn sight better soldier than any o' you slackers. Hang his halter on the cross, too. He was the best damn mule in this man's army!"

THE END.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Bluffer's Luck," "Me and Peewee Limited," "The Trail of Deceit," etc.

BORN in the coldest winter, in the coldest month and on the coldest day ever known in Montana. Thirty-five years later the Kaiser found it out and asked for an armistice. Grew up normally, giving my parents and the neighbors plenty of grief, keeping out of jail by the grace of God and a friendship with the sheriff.

Went to what was known as the toughest school on earth, where I did not add any soothing influence, it seems. General appearance was a split lip, one black eye and a torn shirt. No diploma. In fact, there were no diplomas given. It wasn't even a graded school, except that we had featherweight, lightweight, middleweight and heavyweights.

Expelled four times during final term. The first three times it did not take. Fourth time I found out that the board of trustees was not kidding me; so I went away, deciding to be a traveling salesman, because they wore white collars and smelled of musk.

Like *Hashknife,* I wanted to see the other side of the hill, and my career became rather checkered, ranging from herding sheep to writing stories. I'm still rather proud of my sheep herding. I've worked with cattle, sheep, sold harness and saddles, sold cigars, worked both ends of a street car, railroaded for a while, sold enlarged pictures, ran poker games, kept books, cooked plenty food for hungry crews, prospected, worked as a forest ranger, dug deep in mines—both quartz and placer, trapped, drew newspaper cartoons, acted as cameraman for newspapers, worked as a reporter for years, and finally ended up out on my little ranch in San Fernando Valley, the prettiest spot in Southern California.

Married, got a boy six feet three tall, two five-gaited riding horses, chickens, wild ducks, quail, doves, duck dog and other articles too numerous to mention. Play golf, shoot ducks and quail, addicted to getting long distance static on my radio, wear high-heel boots and a ten-gallon Stetson. Outside of all that, I'm normal and human, I hope. Never been in jail—yet; but as one of my friends recently pointed out, "You're not so awful old—don't brag."

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

TWO WHO HAVE GONE

TWICE during May Death stepped in to still the typewriter of an ARGOSY author.

After a period of illness Francis Lynde passed away on May 16 in his picturesque home on Lookout Mountain, Tennessee. As recently outlined in his biographical sketch in our "Men Who Make The ARGOSY" department, Mr. Lynde was an ex-railroad man and a writer of years' standing. Nearly three hundred stories, articles and books he leaves behind him, among the last being his serial, "A Road at Stake," recently published in ARGOSY.

Less peaceful was the passing of Gordon Stiles, who met death in an automobile accident near Middletown, New York, on the night of May 14—a tragedy which brought to a close a brilliant career as newspaper and magazine writer.

The New York *Herald Tribune* sent Mr. Stiles abroad at the start of the World War and later he became its London correspondent. So well did he fill that position, his ability came to the attention of Lord Northcliffe and Mr. Stiles joined his staff until he enlisted in the English flying corps and became a captain. His military career was cut short by a bad spill. After recuperation in Scotland, he became correspondent in Berlin for the Chicago *Daily News*, and was one of the first group of American newspaper men to go into Russia under Soviet rule. Upon his return to the United States he became associated with the Fox Films Corporation, and then went into fiction writing.

ARGOSY readers will remember him for dozens of short stories, novelettes and serials, his two most recent stories being "The House in Kaiserallee" and "The Great Strafe."

Both of these popular writers take with them our heartfelt thanks for many pleasant hours of reading and our sincere regret that their last story is told.

WHEN it comes to talking favorites there is always a W. Wirt enthusiast ready to have his say. Mr. Berteau has the floor:

San Antonio, Texas.

We have been reading your magazine for less than a year now and have enjoyed every issue. We like all your writers, especially W. Wirt. Would like for you to get him to write more stories like "What Kept You?" and stories of *Jimmie Cordie*, the *Beaneater* and the *Yid, Red Dolan, Grigsby* and *Putney*. Would like to have a story or serial with them in it. My favorite writers are Ray Cummings, W. Wirt, Theodore Roscoe, Ralph Milne Farley, J. E. Grinstead, John H. Thompson, Ralph R. Perry, Eustace L. Adams, H. Bedford-Jones, and Fred MacIsaac.

TOM BERTEAU.

WE cannot republish "The Ship of Ishtar," but for those who want a copy of the story in book form we still have a few volumes left—yours for one dollar each:

Haworth, N. J.

I have just finished reading the first installment of "Alexander the Red" and it sure is swell. According to the first part which I

have read, it seems that it will beat *John Solomon*. "Gone North" is a very fine story, too, and "The Bad Man of Stony Gulch" sure took the cake for the short stories.

Why don't you republish "The Ship of Ishtar"? I have heard so much about it that it sounds good, but the best story I am reading now is "Alexander the Red." Let's have a good Foreign Legion story.

ROBERT MURRAY.

MR. COCHRAN figures that he gets his money's worth:

Logan, W. Va.

This is the first time I have written you, but I have been a reader of the ARGOSY for fifteen years except for times while in out-of-the-way places in the West where I could not always get it. I read it all every issue and have only one fault to find with it: it all ends too soon and it is a long wait till the next week. It is the only magazine I buy, as I suppose there is just enough Scotch blood in my make-up to keep me from paying fifteen to thirty-five cents for other magazines after buying the good old ARGOSY for a dime.

I am inclosing a clipping from the *Herald-Advertiser*, of Huntington, West Virginia, of Sunday, March 16, in regard to "Maza of the Moon." Now in book form it lists at two dollars. I read it when it was *new* for about four bits (fifty cents) and got three other novels thrown in, also five novelettes and about fifteen short stories besides. Can you beat that?

C. R. COCHRAN.

AN old-time Westerner has a few words to say about his neck of the woods:

Seminole, Okla.

Noticing the letter of Mrs. Billie High, of Wichita Falls, Texas, in your April 12 issue, in which she says she began reading the ARGOSY in 1915 and would like to "see some one better it," I am writing to inform Mrs. High that among the ARGOSY family she is but an infant in years. I've never missed an issue since 1904, and feel that I am just about entitled to the rank of "patriarch" of the family. Have never written a line for "Argonotes" because I figure you are running the show and what we think about it cuts but little ice. Mr. Ray's remark about Westerns is justified. The trouble is that so many so-called "Westerns" are written by men who probably never were outside of New York City. In other words, they don't know their West. To see the dialect they pin on cow-puncher characters proves that to any one who ever saw a real puncher. Like all other folks, I have my favorite stories, of course. I care nothing about the 1950 stuff and the moon man imaginations, but then I just pass them up.

Fred MacIsaac is a great writer. Wirt and Worts are both good. In fact, they are all good. I wish the boys would change their cow-puncher dialect, though, to sound something like human language. For instance—how should "yo" for you be pronounced? Punchers pronounce the word you just like any one else. If they would write their stories true to life Westerns would be interesting. For instance, I lived in the Texas Panhandle for years where the cow-puncher flourishes like the green bay tree, and also in the territory of New Mexico, where bandits and train robbers and coyotes and gila monsters grew like cedars of Lebanon. In fact, I practiced law all over the West for twenty years and have defended many men for murder, cow-stealing and train-robbing in that country. I could tell you stories by the hour—real Westerns, without attributing to a puncher anything but ordinary English—for that is what he uses and always used. You have the best magazine in the world. Run it to suit yourself. We get ours sprayed with oil every now and then, but we read it just the same.

JOHN R. GUYER.

HERE is a reader who doesn't think much of the kickers:

Bethel, Kansas.

I have been a reader of ARGOSY for just one year. It certainly is a wonderful magazine. It can't be beat. I have always wanted to write, but refrained from doing so until I read the "Argonotes" this week. Complain, complain and complain some more seems like most all the readers can do. In one year I found one story I did not like, but I figured there were lots of other people who did like it.

There isn't a page in the whole book I miss, from front page to back, advertisements and all. ARGOSY is really all the boughten pleasure we have in our home. That's all we care for.

My husband has been a reader of ARGOSY for about eight years. And he is certainly satisfied. Whether this note is printed in ARGOSY or not I want to say one thing—people who write in and complain are only making themselves look little in lots of people's eyes. Remember the story of the man, the boy and the donkey; that's the way I feel about ARGOSY.

If you try to please every one you won't please any one. I say leave ARGOSY as it is. Its variation is wonderful. I have no favorite author. They are all wonderful. Here's hoping ARGOSY will be published for centuries to come.

MRS. A. E. CUNNING.

THE April 5 issue rang the bell for this reader:

Detroit, Mich.

Allow me to tell you how much I appreciate the fine stories printed in the ARGOSY. I have spent many happy hours reading them. They are so uniformly good that a person is loath to lay down the book until he has read it from cover to cover.

The issue of April 5 was especially good. When one sees such names as Charles Alden Seltzer, Hugh Pendexter and W. Wirt all under one cover, it's bound to be good.

My favorite authors are Ray Cummings, Charles Alden Seltzer, Fred MacIsaac, A. Merritt, W. Wirt, and Ralph Milne Farley.

By the way, some more of these "Radio Planet" stories would be greatly appreciated, I'm sure, by ARGOSY's numerous readers.

ALVIN M. LOTHAMER.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

6-14

Looking Ahead!

THAT CARGO OF OPIUM

A New *Peter the Brazen* Story

by Loring Brent

BY THE SWORD

Stirring days in the Adirondack Mountain country.

A Complete Novelette

by William Merriam Rouse

THEODORE ROSCOE

with a thrilling and unusual story of Abyssinia—

The Little Gold Dove of Gojjam

ROBERT E. PINKERTON

with a story of the British Columbia hand loggers—

Every Man to His Trade

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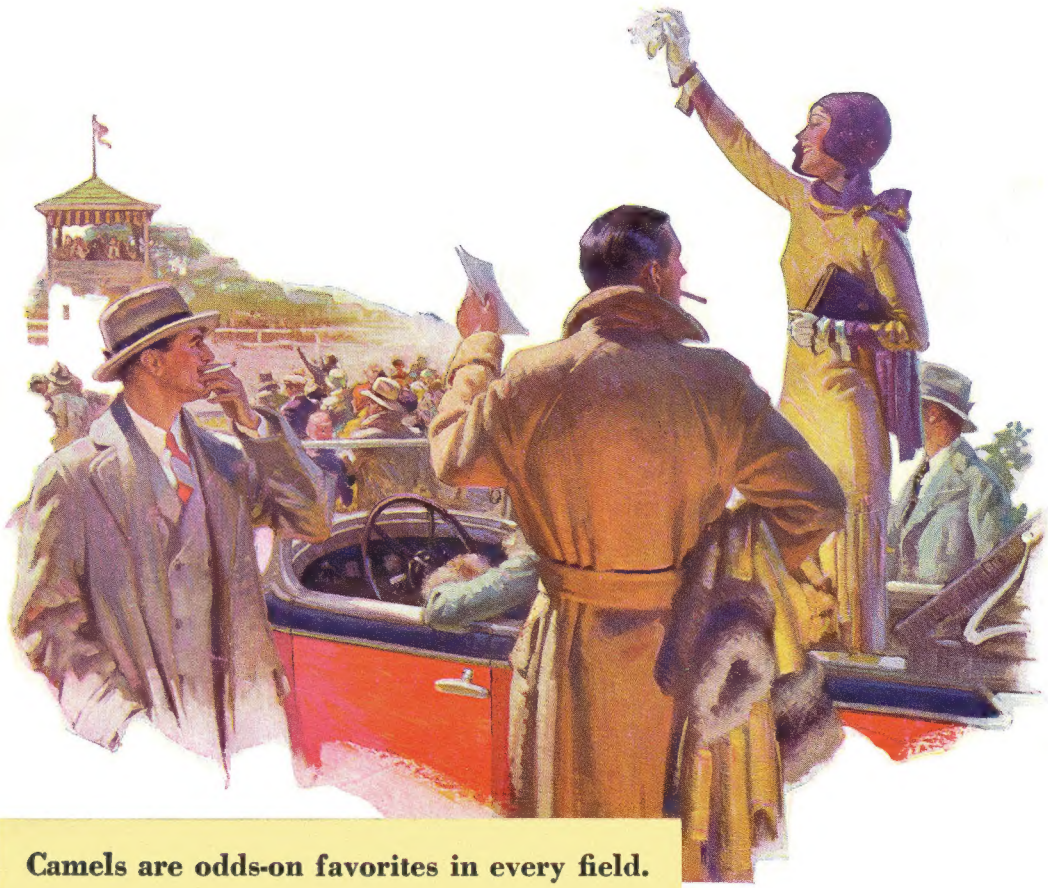

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